SHORTY McCABE GETS THE HAIL

SEWELL FORD

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BY

SEWELL FORD

NEW YORK
EDWARD J. CLODE

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SHORTY McCABE GETS THE HAIL

I

SHORTY PICKS A COMER

I MUST say he was an unpromisin' specimen. He wore his cheek bones high and his forehead low, and the only name anybody in Company B seemed to have for him, from the Captain down, was Joe Pants.

Not that I noticed him 'specially at first. In fact, I expect they had him doin' kitchen police most of the time for a while there when I was startin' the new rookies in on the calisthenics and glove drill. Oh, yes, I'd been doin' a lot of this camp work since the War Department discovered that Shorty McCabe was just as willin' to do his part as anybody else. Course, they'd had my offer filed away for more'n a year. But you know how it's been. There was so many of us high talented people knockin' around that some of us was bound to be overlooked.

Anyway, I guess I made up for lost time, for there in June and July, when the new draft was comin' in so strong, I'd leave the Physical Culture Studio three afternoons a week to go out and show these buddin' Fritz destroyers how to breathe from below the belt and what their hands was made for besides shovelin' in rations. And say, before the Quartermaster had fitted 'em out with any uniforms but blue overalls they wasn't an impressive lookin' lot of democracy savers, take it from me. So it's no wonder, with different squads of a hundred lined up before me every half-hour, I didn't single out this Joe Pants bird right away.

Even when I did it was because he seemed a little more stupid than the rest in catchin' on to what I'm tryin' to make 'em do.

"Say, you! Fifth man from the right!" I calls out. But I don't make any connection at all.

"Ah, let's have the numbers!" I goes on. "One—two—three—four——. Stop! Yes, you. Uh-huh. This is all for your benefit. Sorry to disturb your standee nap, but let's see if we can't get this right. Can't you breathe with your mouth shut? Try it. You won't smother or anything with the goulash trap closed. There! See? Now from way down, with your shoulders back. Ah, for the love of soup! You

ain't a fish, are you? All you moved then was your gills."

Honest, I must have wasted more eloquence on that one peanut-head than on all the rest of the squad.

"Cap'n," I asks confidential after they're dismissed, "who is this pet of yours that's so intelligent from the ankles down?"

"Oh, that one!" says Captain Martin. "Why, that's Joe Pants. He's a Pole, I think."

"Guess that accounts for it," says I. "Wooden all the way from the roof. Maybe you'll make a soldier out of him, too, but I'd save him for a newel post."

The Captain grins. "The sad part of it is, Professor," says he, "that I've got to make a soldier of him."

"You're some wizard if you do," says I.

At that Joe might not have been so much worse than a lot of the others. Part of it, as I finds out later, is due to the fact that he don't understand English very well. Then he's such a pie-faced lookin' gink. With that Swiss cheese complexion, and the dull, wide-set eyes, and the bat ears juttin' out from the side of his head like they was stuck on as an afterthought, he looks almost as human as something carved on a pipe.

And yet it couldn't have been more'n three weeks later, when I'd advanced the squad to

exercise with the soft mitts, that I'm considerable jarred at seein' this Private Pants steam in a half-arm jolt, just the way I'd showed him, the weight followin' the blow, and lift a big husk opposite clean off his feet. First off I thought it must have been an accident, but a few minutes later blamed if he don't shoot over another one just as destructive. That's when I begun to get curious.

"Good work, Joe!" I sings out. "Here! Wait a minute. Gimme a pair of them pillows, Sergeant. Now, Mr. Pants, shove one of them short ones in at me so I can feel if it really has the stuff behind it."

Well, it had. And I want to say it was just as well I was quick in blockin' it off.

"Listen, Joe," says I. "Where'd you get all that?"

Joe hunches his shoulders but otherwise from that don't impart any information.

"I mean," says I, "where you been working —what's your job?"

"Oh, job!" says he, his pale blue eyes brightenin' a little. "Steam boiler man, by Jersey City. Four furnace doors."

"I get you," says I. "You've been tossin' pea coal and rakin' out clinkers. And as an indoor athletic pastime that beats rollin' cigarettes or playin' Kelley pool. Shed the shirt, Joe, and lemme take a squint at them shoulder

muscles of yours. That's it. Z-z-z-z, man! But you have got some development there. Hey, Cap'n! Come look at this, eh? No wonder he's got a punch. And notice the length of those arms—like the hind legs of a kangaroo. Say, if he only knew how to use 'em!"

I wasn't thinkin' so much of boxin' as I was of bayonet work, for I'd been watchin' that cold-steel drill quite a bit and thinkin' how much it was like usin' clever tactics in the ring. And it was really the Captain who suggests that maybe Joe is the very one we've been lookin' for. You see, A Company, havin' been organized some three hours ahead of Company B, had been givin' themselves all the airs of Picardy vets. Besides, in the draft they'd happened to pull this Crab Mitzler, an East Side mug, who'd nipped off first money at a few Olympic Club sessions and was already bein' touted as the lightweight champ of the whole division.

It wasn't so much the chesty motions the Crab went through—though he did kind of throw himself around at times—as the cocky persiflage about him that A Company's Captain and lieutenants indulged in at the officers' mess, which got Cap'n Martin's goat.

"Why," says the Cap'n, "you'd think they had a world beater over there—a second Battling Nelson. They've had his picture in the Sunday papers, talk of having him give exhi-

bition bouts at the nearby cantonments—all that rot. If we could only find a man who——"

"There's no telling, Cap'n," says I. "One may turn up."

Now this ain't the wildly thrillin' account, such as the camp correspondents send out, of how an unknown hero stepped from the ranks and knocked the tar out of the regimental bully. I didn't have such a lot of faith in Private Pants from the first. He didn't act to me as though he had head enough to sidestep the heavy ones. Besides, his footwork was anything but shifty.

Still there was that wonderful punch, and no other good material in sight. So Joe was yanked off the potato peelin' and floor scrubbin' and detailed for orderly duty that took him to town often. Maybe you can guess that he spent his time here in the Studio gettin' some intensive trainin' in the noble art of pluggin' away at the ribs until you can swing for the jaw.

Well, I've handled a lot of comers in my day, before I took to coachin' plutes to stay with the big money game, but I met mighty few plugs who were so crude at the start. Private Pants didn't seem to have the fight instinct. Not that he showed yellow anywhere, but it just didn't seem to be in him to work for a knockout and nothing else.

So I got to probin' into his past. It wasn't

much of a past. And first off it turns out that his real name is Pantlinski. He'd been born and brought up in one of them Polish places with a jaw-breakin' tag, livin' there until he was sixteen, and havin' done farm work ever since he was big enough to lift a hoe. Then him and his mother and an uncle, his old man havin' passed in, had joined a bunch rounded up by a steamship immigration agent and had come to the United States expectin' to get rich right away. Which hadn't happened.

The uncle had been shipped on to a Pennsylvania rollin' mill, where he'd promptly got mixed up with some liquid iron ore, and a generous corporation had paid all the funeral expenses besides expressin' the tin trunk back to his relations in Bayonne.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Pantlinski had connected with a nice easy snap in a steam laundry, workin' only a twelve-hour shift, while Joe had finally found this boiler room job. He's stuck there nearly five years and his pay had been raised to $2.25 a day. At that he'd saved up over $300, and was thinking of taking out his second papers and gettin' married, when his number was drawn at Washington and he found himself herded into this camp.

Not that Joe seemed to mind it. He'd been cussed and kicked around all his life, so when the drill sergeant got a bit personal in his

remarks, Joe took it as a matter of course. He confides to me that he'd never had such good clothes on his back, had never been so clean, and hadn't dreamed there could be so much good food in the world. Course, he expected the Germans would kill him when he got near enough to 'em. They generally did. He'd been brought up to believe that. He didn't hate 'em exactly, nor he didn't seem much afraid. The way he looked at it, this was simply his luck—what he'd been born for.

"Huh!" says I, standin' him up against the gym wall and makin' him look me square in the face. "That's about the poorest dope I ever heard from anybody that called himself a man. If you stick to that, Joe, we might as well stop right here, for this Crab Mitzler party has got you licked now. Understand?"

Joe blinks once or twice and then shakes his head. "That's too bad," says he. "The Captain, he want me to beat him up, don't he?"

"The question is, Joe," I goes on, "do you want to beat him up?"

"Sure," says he.

"Then, that's different," says I. "Now we got something to work on. For it can be done—easy. But you got to forget this whipped-dog stuff. You got to remember, Joe, that you're not only a citizen of the United States

of America, but a soldier in the finest army that ever marched anywhere. You're the pride and hope of a hundred million free people. It's no chain gang army you're in, either. When you salute an officer he's got to salute back. Why, you even have a bugler who has to blow the call before you'll get up in the morning, or go to bed at night. You have cooks gettin' your meals, tailors makin' your uniforms, ships being built to take you across the ocean, doctors and nurses waitin' around to fuss over you if you get sick or hurt, and a whole raft of clerks and so on writin' your name in big books and keepin' track of all the little things you do. Get that?"

Joe says he does.

"Then we'll consider this proposition of what you're going to do to Crab Mitzler when you meet him two weeks from Saturday night," I goes on. "You've seen him in action. His style is to duck his head and wade in—the old rush method. He has a bad wallop, too. You couldn't stop more'n half a dozen of 'em without goin' groggy. So what's the use? You're goin' to start in by coverin' up tight and doin' the one-step backward. Yes, with the crowd howlin' at you to stand up and take your dose. Three rounds of that you'll have to stand for, maybe four; and then, when you hear him breathin' hard and his swings begin to slow up,

you're goin' to cut loose with them short jabs to the ribs. Never mind that ugly mug of his. Hammer away at his slats. And keep hammering, until your rubber gives you the word to watch for a jaw openin'. And when it comes, whip one in, with everything you got behind it. That'll be all. One will do the trick."

Course, it didn't work out just that way. It seldom does. You can't take a man who's dragged his heels all his life and teach him footwork in a month. Early in the bout Joe got in the way of a couple of Crab's stingers. And one or two more later on. By the end of the third round he looked like an easy mark and the Company A people were up on their hind legs howlin' delighted.

But about the middle of the fourth, when Crab got ambitious to finish his man quick and was swingin' a bit wild, Joe began to find his body punch. "Ugh!" remarks Crab, sort of surprised. The fifth was about an even break. Then in the sixth—well, right in the midst of one of his whirlwind rushes, Crab met something solid and impetuous. He meditated on his knees while the referee counted eight. Then he wabbled to his feet again—and met another that sent him almost through the ropes. Ten seconds more and it was all over. A Company's near-champ was a has-been, and Private Joe Pants was being carried around triumphant by

as many Company B men as could get under him, while Captain Martin hammered me on the back enthusiastic.

So I wasn't much astonished, next time I went out to camp, to find that Joe had been made a corporal and been assigned as assistant boxin' instructor to some of the new draftee squads. What did surprise me was to see how easy he handled 'em and how well he'd remembered the things I'd told him.

"Good for you, Joe," says I. "Comin' on, ain't you? I expect you'll be goin' out after the division championship now."

Joe didn't think so. "I don't like to fight so much," says he.

"Savin' it up to feed the Heinies, eh?" says I.

Joe nods and gives me the grin. But from then on he's a different Joe. For one thing, every man in the Company was his friend and showed it. That must have helped. He takes it modest enough, but he begins carryin' his chin up. His back has straightened and stiffened. When you talked to him he met your eyes level. He was doing good work with his squads.

So it was natural when the Top Sergeant overstayed his leave or something, that the one who should get his place was Joe. I happened into camp the day he bloomed out in his new

chevrons. And that was when he first sprung this on me about his mother.

"She don't know yet," says he. "I—I kinda want her to see."

"Course you do," says I. "Why not have her come out right away?"

"No, no," puts in Joe hasty. "Not—not now. The old lady she—she wouldn't be ready."

"Whaddye mean, ready?" says I.

It's the first time, too, I'd ever seen Joe tint up any. But he works up quite a neck color while he's tryin' to explain, and when he's through strugglin' with the language I'm just as wise as when he started.

"Say it in Polish, Joe," says I, "then maybe I can guess."

But Joe won't do that. Just then, though, out from the Hostess House across the way drifts Private Crab Mitzler escortin' a big, high-chested female who looks like she'd been decorated for a grand review. She has on a smashin' big hat with purple ostrich plumes wavin' over it and, although it's a warm day, she has a fur stole draped over her wide shoulders. Also she's sportin' ear danglers and her facial color scheme is some vivid. A regular East Side get-up, suitable for Yom Kippur or any other holiday. Joe takes her all in, up and down.

"Must be Crab's old lady," I suggests. "Some dolled, eh?"

Joe is still followin' her with his eyes set. Finally he turns to me. "My old lady wouldn't —wouldn't be like that," says he.

"No?" says I.

"No," says Joe, kind of smothering a sigh. "She—she'd be wearin' a shawl. No hat, understand; always a shawl, red and green. And her old purple dress, just like at home."

Then I got the idea. "Joe," says I, "you don't mean you'd be ashamed to have your old mother come out here?"

"Me?" says he. "No. What do I care? But she—well, when she saw the other women, she'd feel bad. She'd want to go back, right off."

"Oh, that's it, eh?" says I. "Think she'd feel as if she wasn't dressin' the part, eh? Well, what's to be done?"

"I could send plenty of money," says Joe, "but she wouldn't know how to fix up right. Not her. She don't go out much. If somebody could kinda show her how——"

"Joe," I breaks in, "I hope you ain't puttin' anything like that up to me?"

"You—you couldn't do it?" he asks pleadin'.

"Ab-so-lutely not," says I. "I'm handy at a few things, but when it comes to costumin' anybody's mother for a visit to camp, I'll have to pass. That's a female job. But see here; ain't

you got any women relations, or any young lady friends you could call on?''

He thinks hard for a minute or so, and then announces hesitatin': ''There's Minna and Rosa, my second cousins. But they—they're too stuck-up and stylish. They work in a big store by Newark.''

''Then they're elected,'' says I. ''They'd be the very ones.''

Joe seems to think they wouldn't do it. ''You leave it to me,'' says I. ''I'll persuade 'em.''

I'd got kind of interested in the game by that time. Besides, as Joe's regiment was due to be shipped over within the next week or so, and as this might be the only chance the old lady would have of seeing him—maybe the last time she ever would see him—I thought it was due to both of 'em. So I spends most of an afternoon chasin' around on the Jersey side.

And Joe hadn't exaggerated any about his second cousins. I located 'em all right, one in the suit department, the other at the bargain waist counter. And for girls who'd landed at Ellis Island not more'n six years before they sure had caught on. You know—zippy dressers on and off and not bashful about chattin' through the gum. They was some impressed, though, to hear how Cousin Joe had got to be a Non Com and boss of a lot of men.

"Wouldn't that bump you, Minn?" says Rosa. "Joe a officer. Wisht we could see him at it once."

"You can," says I, "if you'll take this $40 he's sent and outfit the old lady for the excursion."

"Will we!" says Rosa. "That's one little thing we will do, and do handsome. Trust us. How about next Sunday?"

"Fine!" says I. "I'll hunt her up and let her know."

At the laundry they was good enough to give her five minutes off to talk to a stranger in the front office. A bent-shouldered, weary-eyed little old girl it is that comes out wipin' her hands on her burlap apron. I don't suppose she was much over forty at that, but she might have been sixty from her looks. Years of field work, and more years tendin' a steam mangle are bound to tell. And she seemed rather dazed at the prospect of visitin' the camp.

"Aye like to coom," says she, "but—but Aye no tank Aye can."

"Sure you can," says I. "Minna and Rosa are goin' along. They'll fix you up for it."

"Oh!" says she. "Well, maybe Aye coom. Aye dunno, though."

I didn't either. She's such a timid, pathetic, little old party. Where the girls were going to

begin on her, or how they would finish, was beyond me. It looked hopeless.

So when I 'phoned over Saturday forenoon to ask Minna how they was progressin', I was prepared to hear that the party had been called off. But it hadn't.

"Sure thing!" says Minna. "We'll make the 9.15 ferry—Desbrosses."

Even then I had cold feet. It's a flossy bunch that streams into them camps of a Sunday, and it would be too bad if Joe's mother should get to sizin' 'em up and balk right at the gate. Besides, I kind of wanted Joe to be able to show her around the place, without havin' any of them new rookies snickerin' at him.

That's why, when I runs across Pinckney—who's about the swellest friend I've got—I had this nervy hunch about borrowin' his car. And when I'd sketched out my scheme for loadin' Mrs. Pantlinski into his limousine, where she could peek through the curtains if she was too panicky to climb out, he falls for it like the true sport he is.

"My only regret, Shorty," says he, "is that I have but one enclosed car to lend to my country."

Course, this means I've got to go along with the chauffeur, so's to pick up the right trio at the ferry. But what's a Sunday forenoon now and then? I was down there with the old-rose-

lined bus at 9 A.M., and when the crowds begun pourin' off I had my neck stretched and my eyes open.

I was some disgruntled, too, when I got my first glimpse of the girls, for there's three of 'em. I figured that when the old lady had backed out they had just rung in a friend and come right along. I wasn't goin' to hail 'em at all, but they spots me before I could duck and booms right over.

"Well, of all the swell-elegance!" says Rosa. "Say, Mister, you're a reg'lar feller, ain't you? Do we go in the rollin' boudoir?"

"Where's the old lady?" I demands.

"Did you hear that, Minn?" says Rosa, snickerin'.

"That's handin' us sumpin', I guess," says Minna. "Have another look, Professor. The one in the middle."

Then it's me with my mouth open and my eyes poppin', for the middle party—the one in the nifty blue lid with the veil to match, with her hair fluffed out and twisted into pats over her ears—is Mrs. Pantlinski. I gasps and continues to stare at her up and down, from the 18-button white kid boots to the powdered nose and the little dabs of color worked in artistic just under the cheek bones.

"Will she pass, Mister?" asks Rosa.

"Pass!" says I. "Why she'll have 'em

goggle-eyed out there. What gets me is how you could do it all on $40."

"Less'n four," says Minna. "What have we got extra wardrobes for, anyhow? But it's lucky she was about our size."

Then I turns curious to see how the old girl is takin' it, bein' flossed up like a Canal Street chicken. But say, she's wearin' a pleased, simple look, and there's almost a sparkle in her tired eyes.

"Don't they fix me up grand to see Joe?" she asks. "Aye—Aye never been fixed up this way before, but—but it's kinda nice. Aye hope Joe likes me this way."

I hoped he would. I wasn't a bit sure, though. All the way out to camp I'd keep lookin' at her and wonderin'. Course, when you got right close you could see the wrinkles at the eye corners, and the yellowish lined cheeks under the drug-store complexion. But a little distance off, blamed if the effect wasn't stunnin'. She must have been quite a good-looker when she was young, and them snappy clothes had brought most of it back. But wouldn't Joe be too jarred for words?

He was. All he can do for the first few minutes is stand and gawp at her. Then gradually a smile lights up his dull-lookin' face—a happy, satisfied, proud smile, that lasts all the rest of the time we saw him.

"You—you look fine, Ma," says he.

"You look awful nice, too, Joe," says she, runnin' her fingers gentle over his sleeve chevrons.

And for two hours, until Mrs. Pantlinski says she can't take another step in them high-heeled boots, Joe tows her around through the barracks and grounds, introducing her to everybody he can find who'll stop long enough, from the Captain to the stew cook. And when he finally helps her into the limousine, after a last fond clinch, Sergeant Pantlinski stands watchin' her whirled away, his hat off respectful, and a big drop of brine tricklin' down either side of his nose.

"This war stuff," remarks Minna, "is sump'n' fierce, ain't it?"

"Some of it is," says I, "and then, again, some of it ain't!"

II

SPEED WORK FOR PIPKIN

THERE was Pinckney and me and Mortimer Judders. Course, there was a hundred or two others on board the Southland Limited, not countin' the train crew and the minstrel aggregation in charge of the diner. But, bein' shut off the way we were, we didn't see much of the rest of the passengers. Oh, my, no! Judders couldn't have stood it to be mixed in promiscuous. So all we had was the drawin'-room and an adjoinin' compartment, which makes a real cute little two-room flat on wheels.

I don't mean we had a wheel-chair patient on our hands. No; Judders was just dead from the chin up. You know—one of the sleep-walkers. First few times I saw Judders, I thought he'd been doped. Maybe I've stated it a bit strong, but Judders wasn't what you'd call a real active member. Seemed like he was muscle-bound in the brain and was sufferin' from ossification of the temperament. And I never got over bein' surprised when he said anything on his own hook, or now and then

revealed that he did have certain likes and dislikes.

Along in the late thirties, Judders was, and an old bachelor—of course. You couldn't imagine him ever havin' pep enough to try to get married, and I expect he never had. Whether or not he'd inherited this expensive system of livin' along with his preferred stocks and six per cent bonds, I never found out. But he had it. Oh, yes; nothing impulsive or offhand about Judders' program of life. Near as I could figure, he'd been followin' the same routine, year in and year out, ever since he'd come into his pile.

No, that's wrong. I did hear Pinckney mention how he changed his rooms at the club once, and one season he went to Bermuda instead of Piney Springs, Georgia. Outside of that, though, he'd stuck to schedule—startin' South right after the first two weeks of grand opera, comin' up in April, goin' to Tuxedo June 15, and landin' back at the club the Saturday after Labor Day.

Not such a poor order of events, I'll admit. Strikes me I could follow that and have more or less fun. But it does seem wasted on Judders. I should have said he'd been just as contented, providin' he'd started that way, if he'd been planted in dry sand about up to his neck, same as they keep some kinds of vege-

tables. Just as useful to society that way, too.

You might think it odd of Pinckney, trailin' around such a non-conductor, bein' about as much of a live wire himself as you'd find in a week's hunt. But that's Pinckney—always showin' up with some queer gink or other, and lettin' on how there's a lot more in 'em than anyone suspects.

"Huh!" says I, after he's sprung Mortimer on me for the first time. "Is he all bone above the eyes, or what?"

"Nothing of the kind, Shorty, I assure you," says Pinckney. "My friend Judders has a mental equipment rather over than under the average."

"Hides it well," says I.

"Besides," goes on Pinckney, "he has an amazingly even disposition, as well as many excellent traits of character which I am discovering from time to time."

"You're some grand little explorer, Pinckney," says I. "It's a pity there ain't more poles to be located."

"Ah!" says he, lightin' another cigarette. "What is the finding of a certain point of latitude compared to the most trivial excursion into that vast uncharted mystery, the mind of man?"

"Eh?" says I, gawpin'.

"My latest theory about Judders," says he, "is that he lacks merely the subconscious

initiative. It is there, of course, but dormant."

"Meanin'," says I, makin' a wild stab, "that he needs a jolt somewhere to make him come out of the spell?"

"Quite so," says Pinckney. "And I have an idea, Shorty, that between us we can supply the necessary psychic urge."

"Ah, come!" says I. "Lay off ringin' me in. I'm dizzy now."

But a day or so later Pinckney tows him in again. His new hunch is that what Judders needs most is some of my physical culture work —a half-hour boxin' lesson every day.

"After all," says Pinckney, "it may be an indolent liver."

"Sometimes it is," says I.

As a matter of fact, Mortimer does look a little yellow. But say, you might as well try teachin' a guinea-pig to play Kelley pool. Mortimer's notion of boxin' is to hold the gloves out rigid, like he was offerin' 'em for sale, and gaze at me amiable. No good rappin' him on the beak, or steamin' one in on his ribs. He just acts surprised and puzzled. The wand drill and medicine-ball stunts was more in his line. He got quite interested in that work, 'specially when I made kind of a game of it. Did him good, too, so far as his general health went. But when it came to developin' what Pinckney calls the psychic urge, there's nothin' doin'.

"It's higher up than the liver," says I. "Where he's torpid is between the ears."

Then it came time for Judders to go South, as per schedule, and he staggers both of us by proposin' that I go along and relieve the monotony of the trip by givin' him his usual exercises.

"Where?" says I. "On the Pullman roof?"

"Couldn't we manage something of the sort in a drawing-room?" he asks. And when he suggests that he'll pay fifty a day and expenses, I figures I can't afford to stay at home.

"By Jove!" says Pinckney. "If you two are going to do traveling gymnasium work all the way to Georgia, hanged if I don't trot along, too. It ought to be worth watching."

So that's how we come to be sportin' around in all this transportation space. And by openin' up the two compartments we did have quite a lot of room to step around in. Anyway, I managed to give Mortimer enough exercise the first afternoon out so he got in a good night's sleep.

It was about nine o'clock next mornin', and we was just finishin' breakfast in the dinin'-car, when we notices that the train is makin' a longer stop than the usual water-tank halt. The word is passed around that an air-couplin' had gone bad and the brakes on the rear sleeper

had been set. A lot of passengers was pilin' off, so we follows.

And you know how good it seems to get out of them stuffy cars, where they use the same air from November to June, and pump in a fresh supply that ain't loaded with dust and cinders. Besides, we'd left half a foot of slush on Broadway, with more snow bein' added, while down here the warm sun was dryin' up a light frost and the grass alongside the tracks was still green. Over in a field to the right some darkies was doin' a little late cotton-pickin'. On the other side is what passes for a town, I suppose. There's a wooden station that might have been painted once, a general store with a couple of mule teams hitched in front, maybe a dozen frame houses, and a two-storied shack that somebody's had the nerve to call a hotel.

"Cunnin' little metropolis, ain't it?" says I. "Wonder what they call it?"

"This," says Pinckney, "is the fair village of Pipkin, South Carolina."

"Pipkin, eh?" says I. "Looks it. I hope we ain't tied up here for any length of time."

That remark seems to stir something in Mortimer's mind. He glances around disapprovin' on Pipkin in general, and then taps Pinckney on the arm.

"I say," says he, "what if one did have to

stay in such a place for—well, for a week or so?"

"But why not?" demands Pinckney.

"Don't!" protests Mortimer. "That's too absurd."

If he'd known Pinckney as well as I do, he wouldn't have put it just that way. I could tell he'd made a mistake the minute I saw that flicker in Pinckney's black eyes.

"My dear Mortimer," says Pinckney, "to be absurd now and then is the high privilege of man alone. Also, it is that which adds the fine savor to existence. Now, neither of us has the vaguest idea as to what living in Pipkin is like. Here is our opportunity to find out. Let's."

"Oh, I say!" gasps Mortimer.

"Your own suggestion," comes back Pinckney. "An inspired impulse! Who knows? And we've just time to do it. Here, porter! Get those bags of ours off right away."

"But—but, Pinckney!" wails Mortimer, that long, vacant face of his suddenly registerin' seven kinds of agitated emotion.

"Quit your kiddin'," I puts in.

No use. Pinckney is shovin' a fiver at Rastus and urgin' him to get a jump on. When I sees that he meant it I takes a hand at helpin', gatherin' up stray articles that we'd left layin' around. Meantime the train crew has mended the air-pipes, there comes a warnin' whistle

from the engine, and as I dashes out on my second trip the last of the passengers was climbin' aboard. So I drapes an overcoat on Judders' right arm, jams his shavin' kit and a couple of collars into his hands, and balances his derby on top of his travelin' cap. As he sees the train movin' off without him, he lets out a desperate groan, and we fairly had to hold him from runnin' after it.

"But I—I simply can't stay here," he moans.

"How do you know until you've tried?" says Pinckney. "Which is precisely what we are about to do."

"But this—this is awful," insists Judders.

"Mortimer," says Pinckney, backin' him against a heap of kit-bags and suitcases and makin' him sit down, "allow me to correct your point of view. You seem to think life is a fixed, cut-and-dried affair—a tread-mill. Well, it isn't. It is a glorious, splendid adventure."

Mortimer tried to crash in with some gulpy remark, about not carin' for adventure, but Pinckney cuts him off:

"You think it essential to your comfort and happiness that you should go, at this exact date every year, to that inexpressibly dull Piney Springs of yours. I know perfectly well what you do there, for I've watched you at it. Every forenoon you play a wretched game of golf with some other duffer, and for the rest of the day

you sit around trying to convince yourself that you're not horribly bored. While here—here you have before you Pipkin—fresh, untried, unexploited; new surroundings; a new manner of life; perhaps the most entertaining of episodes awaiting. Then ho for Pipkin!''

Course, it's a nutty line of talk, but with Mortimer's face to watch I couldn't help enjoyin' it. If he'd been dropped on a desert island he couldn't have looked more dazed or desperate. He just sits there on the baggage, clutchin' his razor-strop and shavin' brush, starin' down the track after the disappearin' train.

''Don't quite seem to get that adventure stuff, does he?'' says I. ''Acts more like he thought life was a term in jail.''

''Oh, give him time,'' says Pinckney. ''Now suppose we see about accommodations.''

That didn't take long. The landlord of the Pipkin House was snoozin' in a porch chair not two hundred feet away. He wasn't keen at first about bein' roused up, but Pinckney finally got him to show us what he had in the way of rooms. Anyway, he called 'em rooms. They looked more like box-stalls to me. I expect a finicky mule-buyer or a real particular fertilizer agent would have put up a holler over 'em; but Pinckney only give me the grin and says how we'll take 5, 7 and 9.

"Of course," he adds, "you will have them thoroughly cleaned and aired. I would suggest fresh sheets, too; and I am sure you can find some water pitchers that are not cracked."

"Excuse me, Mister," says the landlord, "but what you-all think yer gittin' for a dollar'n a half?"

"Ah, ha! Your error," says Pinckney, pokin' him playful in the ribs. "We are paying three dollars a day each—perhaps four. It depends upon how good a dinner you can get for us. I am leaving that entirely to you. But please try to make it worth four."

"Ah suttinly will, suh," says the landlord.

When he gives his whole attention to it he's some jollier, Pinckney. And slippin' a five or a ten here and there along with his josh he surely can get things done. When we struck the Pipkin House it hardly looked like a goin' concern. Half an hour later it was fairly hummin' with busy hands. Two darkies were sweepin' off the front porch, another was scrubbin' the office floor, others was shakin' rugs from the upper windows, and out back we could hear some women-folks directin' a chicken chase. By the squawks I could make a good guess as to what might happen for dinner. Honest, when we come to lift Mortimer off the baggage and lead him up there was hardly any quiet spot to put him. So we started out on a

sandy road that wanders off into the tall long-leaf pines and walked him about four miles.

And you know it ain't half so bad as it looks from the car windows, this South Carolina section of the map. 'Specially on such a mellow January day as this. For one thing, you get reg'lar breathin' air—clean and piny smellin' and full of pep. Then, there's so many things to see—little coffee-colored brooks meanderin' across the road, quail whirrin' up from the bushes and white woolly clouds floatin' lazy in the blue sky.

In the clearin's we came across little groups of darky cabins with mud-chinked walls and mud chimneys and groups of pickaninnies playin' around. At one place Pinckney bought a live turkey and sent it back to the hotel. At another he bargained for a roastin' pig, to be delivered next day. Even Mortimer almost smiled as he stood watchin' the antics of them little razor-backs.

"How odd!" says he. "Do you know, I never knew before that pigs—er—came in such small sizes."

"They don't on Fifth Avenue," says I. "How's your dinner appetite about now?"

"Really," says he, "I am getting quite hungry."

He was more than that before we landed back at the hotel, and he had begun askin' Pinckney

if one could manage to get a decent meal at such a place.

"One never knows," says Pinckney. "But that makes this sort of thing all the more interesting."

I'll confess the dinin'-room didn't look promisin'—a dingy table-cloth, thick crockery, and a full assortment of ketchup bottles, pickle jars and vinegar cruets starin' at us. But say, when the fried chicken and sweet potatoes and hominy cakes was set on we forgot such trifles as nicked plates and damp napkins. We went to it like hired hands after a twelve-hour day.

"That's what I call a reg'lar meal," says I, finishin' my third hominy cake with honey.

"Thankee, suh," says the landlord. "Everyone around heah allows th' missus is some cook when she spreads herself."

Then we loafs around outside in the sun until Pinckney suggests we do some more explorin'.

"I say," he asks the landlord, "what are the principal objects of interest in your town?"

"Well," says the landlord thoughtful, "there's Grimes's brickyard, down the road a spell."

"Good!" says Pinckney. "We will inspect it."

"Oh, I say!" protests Judders.

"Mortimer," says Pinckney, "did you ever visit a real brickyard? Ah, I thought not! No

more have I. Then here is our opportunity."

So off we tramps again until we gets to this huddle of tumble-down sheds surroundin' a smeary hole in a clay bank. I must say, it ain't much of a sight; but Pinckney pretends to get real thrilled over it.

"Just think!" says he. "Here is an important industrial process of which we are utterly ignorant. If we could only find this Mr. Grimes, now—— Ah, I wonder if this can be the man?"

It could and was. He's a picturesque old patriarch with a full set of long-staple whiskers and jutty eyebrows. He's sittin' on a stump watchin' three slow movin' darkies who are shovelin' red clay into wheelbarrows and trundlin' 'em up out of the pit on a string of rotten planks. He admits that his name is Grimes and that he owns the outfit. Also, bein' urged by Pinckney, he sketches out how the clay is handled, from the time it's dug out until it leaves the firin' kilns for the stackin' sheds.

"And then," says Pinckney, "the bricks are ready to be shipped off and made into homes and factories and garden walls. How interesting!"

"Mebby," says Mr. Grimes. "But fer a man who's tryin' to pile up enough to carry him back to Schenectady, York State, it's a mighty poor business proposition."

"But, my dear sir," says Pinckney, "why leave such a charmingly named town for a city with so unlovely a name as that?"

"Names don't count much with me," says Grimes. "Besides, my old friend, Jeb Snyder, lives in Schenectady; and now that my daughter's married and moved off, and the old woman's gone—well, I kinder got a hankerin' to see Jeb onct more. Don't look like I'd fetch it, though."

"Then I am to understand," says Pinckney, "that you find the brick business unprofitable?"

"Make enough to keep alive, that's about all," says Grimes, tampin' down his old pipe. "Wisht I could sell out, that's what I wish."

"Ah!" says Pinckney, his eyes sparklin'. "You would sell? And at what figure?"

"Why," says Grimes, "if I could git fifteen hundred cash I—I'd—— But say, stranger, you don't happen to know anybody that'd want to buy, do ye?"

"Yes," says Pinckney prompt. "This gentleman here, Mr. Mortimer Judders, would be delighted to purchase your brickyard."

"Wha—what's that?" gasps Mortimer.

"See how enthusiastic he is?" says Pinckney, nudgin' Grimes. "I suppose it has been one of his secret ambitions for years, and now that the happy chance has brought the thing actually within his reach——"

"Please, Pinckney!" breaks in Judders. "Really, you know, I don't wish to own a brickyard."

"Yesterday, Mortimer, I might have believed you," says Pinckney. "But you've given yourself away. Who was it suggested stopping off at Pipkin? You, Mortimer. No use denying it. And I presume you thought we would not notice how eager you were to get out here. But we did, didn't we, Shorty? Well, there is nothing unmanly about such a desire, nor any good reason why it should not be gratified. Perhaps you have a special, heaven-sent gift for brick-making. Who knows? Thus far it has been latent, lying hidden in the bud. But now—well, all that is necessary for you to enter on your chosen career is the mere writing of a check. Professor McCabe, let Mr. Judders take your fountain-pen."

"But, Pinckney, I—I——" begins Mortimer.

Whatever he meant to say, he couldn't get it out. I don't know if you'd call it mesmerism, or what. Maybe it was just that it's so seldom he has a new proposition batted up to him sudden that he's simply stunned. And then, he'd been so used to followin' Pinckney's lead that I expect he didn't know how to duck. Anyway, he acts like he was in a trance. And the next thing I know, he's taken the pen and is writin'

what Pinckney tells him. As for Grimes, he's almost as much staggered as Judders.

"There!" says Pinckney, handin' over the check. "Now make out a bill of sale, Mr. Grimes, and to-morrow the deed for the land can be transferred. Congratulations, Mortimer. You are now a captain of industry."

I don't know what move Pinckney looked for from Judders. Ten to one, all he saw was a chance to put over something foolish on him, just for the sake of seein' how Mortimer would take it. Well, for a while there you'd think he'd been gassed in the trenches. Honest! We didn't get a word out of him for more'n two hours. And then, as we're sittin' around a pine-knot fire in the hotel office, waitin' for supper, he murmurs once or twice, sort of to himself:

"Bricks! Making bricks in a brickyard!"

"Quite so," says Pinckney. "Beautiful thought, isn't it?"

"I—I don't know," says Judders, starin' at the fire.

He turned into the feathers early that night, before nine o'clock, leavin' Pinckney and me gassin' with the landlord and old man Grimes. Mortimer must have been up an hour or more when we came down in the mornin', for he'd finished breakfast and was waitin' for us in the dinin'-room.

"Do you know," says he, "I've been thinking a lot about this brickmaking business."

"Naturally, Mortimer," says Pinckney. "Being in it, you're bound to."

"I don't see," goes on Judders, "why it shouldn't be made to pay."

"Eh?" says Pinckney, gazin' across the table at him.

"I happen to know a chap," says Mortimer, "who gets quite a large income from brickyard interests—up the Hudson somewhere. Manages the business himself, I believe. Harkley is the name—Joe Harkley."

"Oh, yes," says Pinckney. "I've met him at the club, haven't I?"

Mortimer don't seem to hear the question, but rambles along.

"Now, it occurs to me," says he, "that Mr. Grimes may not be using the best methods. Those darkies with wheelbarrows—such a slow way. There ought to be—— I say, Pinckney, if I could get Harkley to lend me a few men—a foreman and some brickmakers who know their job thoroughly—and with some up-to-date machinery, I—I believe I could make a go of it!"

It's Pinckney who's gaspin' now.

"By George!" says he. "You—you really mean to try it? You are going to stay—here?"

"Of course," apologizes Mortimer, "I am no

business man. I have never done anything of the sort. But, as you mentioned yesterday, this may be precisely the one thing I can do. It—it would be rather interesting to try, wouldn't it? And, while this hotel is somewhat crude, I think I could fix up some decent quarters here. I might buy a half interest, you know, put in a few baths, enlarge some of the rooms, set up a small electric light plant for the town, get the railroad to run a spur track out to the brickyard, and——"

"Stop!" says Pinckney, holdin' up both hands. "Are you joking, Mortimer?"

Judders gives him an injured look.

"Certainly not," says he, gettin' up and startin' for the door.

"But—but where are you going?" asks Pinckney.

"To telegraph Harkley," says he.

"Fancy!" gasps Pinckney, as the door slams. "Mortimer!"

"Listens like you'd started something for Pipkin, don't it?" says I.

And he sure had. We stayed on long enough to see the first gang arrive, a superintendent with half a dozen men, who reports that two carloads of machinery was followin'. Also we saw the carpenters start work on Mortimer's three-room suite, and looked over his plans for the new power house.

When we left, he was pacin' up and down the hotel office, dictatin' letters to a stenographer, while outside were two county commissioners, some railroad men, an automobile agent, and four contractors, all waitin' to see him. And we had to dodge painters, paper-hangers, and steam-fitters as we struggled through the front door.

"Think of it!" says Pinckney. "Mortimer! I would hardly recognize him as the same person."

"He ain't," says I. "And if that psychic urge stuff holds out for six months you won't know Pipkin, either."

III

TOUCHING ON THE KINNEYS

No, I wouldn't have thought it of a Kinney. Anyhow, not of this particular breed. For our Kinneys out here in Rockhurst-on-the-Sound—well, they're the kind we don't admit havin' in our midst unless we have to. They're on the tax books, I suppose, and the men have their names on the votin' lists. But outside of that they don't count for much.

As I've often told Sadie when she was distributin' charity funds or makin' up Christmas baskets: "Don't go wastin' money or sympathy on the Kinneys. You'll get no thanks from 'em if you do; besides, they don't deserve it. Take it from me, they're poor trash."

"But Shorty," she'd come back, "that's just why I want to do something for them."

So off she would go, with a bundle of little Sully's outgrown things for the kids, along with candy and toys, and maybe a boiled ham or a roast turkey, to be gawped at silent by the youngsters and received haughty by the Kinney women.

They live just north of the Point, where the

salt marshes make in along the creek. Two little half-acre knolls heave up out of the marsh there, one on either side of the creek, and on each knoll is a Kinney shack. Scott Kinney lives in one, Bruce Kinney in the other. I expect the original Kinney squatted there years ago, but I understand he got some sort of title. Anyway, nobody ever disturbed him. He built the first shack on the south side of the creek. Later on a brother of his drifted down from Connecticut and built on the other side. They fished and clammed and caught eels and raised children and drank booze out of a jug. You know the kind.

Also they started the Kinney feud. I don't know as anybody can say now what it was all about in the beginning. Probably nothing much. And it wasn't one of the picturesque kind you read about where they shoot and carve each other up reckless. The original Kinneys took it out, so old settlers tell me, in cuttin' each other's nets, settin' the other one's boat adrift, or smashin' his eel pots. Except once in a while when they met in town on election days or the Fourth, well primed with bad whiskey, they'd maul each other in some bar-room and get sent to the cooler for it. Oh, nice citizens, the Kinneys!

But by the time we moved out here to enjoy the simple country life and be surrounded by a

lot of near-plute neighbors the older Kinneys had passed on, and the shacks on the marsh were occupied by this pair. Seems all the youngsters of one fam'ly had left, or died or gone to jail. Anyway, Bruce and Scott are brothers.

For a while, too, I hear they promised to turn out fairly decent. They fished regular, started a little market that they ran on shares, and owned a motor boat together. Even after Bruce married this husky country girl from some farm up back of Portchester the partnership was kept up. It was after Scott brought home a blushin' bride that the families begun to disagree violent and frequent.

There was nothing country about Mrs. Scott Kinney. She'd been born and brought up on Third Avenue and it was only because she happened to spend a summer as second girl at one of the big houses down on the Point that she met Scott. Her idea of life was to prop her elbows on a pillow and lean out of a window to watch people go by; or to spend her Sunday off taking in a chowder party trip up the Hudson. So she must have found it sort of monotonous livin' in a two-room shack on the north side of Rockhurst creek, where nothing went by but the tide. And I expect her and Mrs. Bruce Kinney, who seemed contented to go on gettin' fatter and redder faced and raisin' more tow-headed youngsters—well, no wonder they didn't hit it off.

Anyway, the Kinney feud was revived. I don't know how long it had been goin' on when I first heard of it. Bruce Kinney had been supplyin' us with clams and the last two lots he'd left at the kitchen door without collectin' for. So when I runs across Scott slouchin' along the Shore Road I holds him up.

"Here," says I, countin' out the change, "hand this to that brother of yours, will you?"

Scott scowls at me and shakes his head.

"Why not?" I demands.

"I don't have no truck with him," growls Scott.

"You mean you don't even speak to him?" says I.

"We ain't passed a word for years," says Scott.

"Well," says I, "I don't know as I blame either of you."

I meant it all, too. For of all the cheap, grouchy, hang-dog lookin' specimens, the Kinney brothers are about as bad as they run. Scott is the tall, lanky one with the ragged, sandy lip whisker and the scar over his left eye. Bruce is stockier built but his arms are just as long. His face is wider and don't look quite so villainous, but he ain't a party a timid person would like to meet at night on a back road. Also Bruce has a game knee and walks with a sort of hitch and shuffle.

Not that either one of 'em was ever guilty of a hold-up or anything like that. They wouldn't have the sand. No, they're just shiftless, low-down, good-for-nothings, too lazy to do much real work but just onery enough to accumulate all the mean little habits there are in circulation.

First and last I tried out the Kinney brothers in a good many ways, mostly on Sadie's account. At different times I've had 'em around the place, got 'em jobs in town. I even had Scott cleaned up once and dressed him in white ducks to act as float man at the Yacht Club. But neither of 'em ever lasted out a whole week without queerin' himself. They'd either get to soldierin' or turn sulky and impudent, or show up so fuddled in the head that they had to be fired.

And meanwhile they lived, just across the muddy little creek from one another, with their families, never swappin' a word or a look. If there'd been anybody else they could have chummed with it wouldn't have seemed quite so absurd. But there wasn't. And day after day Bruce's troop of tow heads would straggle off to school, with Scott's two youngsters taggin' a hundred yards behind. That is until the two bigger boys—Buck and Tubby—grew up enough to loaf around the village or go fishin' with their dads.

Day after day, too, the Kinney women would

work around their cluttered door yards, hangin' out the wash or choppin' firewood, without so much as a nod to each other. In the front of each shack was a single dirty window that seemed to glare across at the other hostile.

Yet the Kinneys seemed bound to do things just alike. If Scott got tanked up of a Saturday night and had words with his wife, so did Bruce. When Bruce painted his power dory a sickly green with a red stripe around the gunnel, Scott got hold of the same kind of paint and daubed his old boat up similar.

Their duck enterprise was what got me, though. One spring Scott found someone in the village with a flock of these Muscovy ducks, the kind with a red bunch on their bills, and bought a pair. He hadn't had 'em more'n a week before Bruce Kinney went scoutin' around and came home with a pair, too. For a while each brother kept his ducks penned up separate, but they didn't do well, so they had to let 'em out and something happened to one of Scott's pair. Then of course the single duck joined the other two and went swimmin' around with 'em as friendly as you please. Worse than that, even went to layin' eggs in Bruce's pen. That got Scott real wrathy. He'd stand on his side of the creek and cuss out that singleton duck of his real fervent. But the ducks, not havin' the finer human instincts, didn't recognize the feud at all.

"Dod gast ye!" says Scott. "I'll learn ye to stay to home." And he lugs out a gun and shoots his duck.

Sadie got the details of that affair a couple of weeks later, when she was down there inquirin' after the youngest of Bruce Kinney's brood, little Beryl Blanche, who'd been missing from the flock for a week or so. She wouldn't have known about Beryl Blanche then if she hadn't happened to have held up Tubby Kinney, the oldest of Bruce's boys, who'd come home again after having been off for a spell working on a coasting schooner. He's a squatty, hulkin' youth, Tubby, just about as industrious and enterprisin' as you'd expect.

"Oh, I guess the folks are all right," he tells Sadie, "less'n it's Beryl. She's sort of ailin' 'round."

Beryl was all of that. The doctor Sadie sent down said it was some serious stomach trouble due probably to poor feedin', maybe too much boiled cabbage, and he didn't expect her to pull through. She didn't, either. But when the little funeral procession of two village hacks, with the little casket in one, wound across the marshes and up towards the village cemetery, none of the Scott Kinneys was in evidence.

"Wouldn't you have thought, Shorty," says Sadie, "that some of them would have come over, at a time like that?"

"I might," says I, "if I hadn't known Scott Kinney so well."

I think that was the fall before we got into the big war. Anyway I remember, along about then, of comin' up through town one Saturday night and hearin' someone holdin' forth loud and rabid about the Lusitania business and what we ought to do to the Huns. It's Scott Kinney. He was for wadin' right in then and there and moppin' up the whole German race some mornin' before breakfast.

"Jest gimme 'bout ten rigiments of good fightin' Americans," says Scott, "an' I'll guarantee to go over thar and bring back the old Kaiser and the Crown Prince with their ears sewed together. I'd end their baby murderin', dam quick."

But somehow nobody offered to put Scott in command of the army and I expect he slept off most of his patriotism by noon next day. I noticed, too, that when the call come for volunteers, and so many of our young college hicks left for Plattsburg, or joined up with the marines, or the artillery, or got into the flying corps, that the two Kinney boys was still hangin' around home. Buck Kinney had developed into a pool shark, I heard; could take on most any cue artist in town and spot him five balls. Then came the first draft, and a couple

of days before the drawin' I finds Scott waitin' for me at the gate one mornin'.

"Do you suppose they'll git Buck?" says he.

"I don't see why they shouldn't," says I. "He's of age, ain't he?"

"Jest," says Scott. "And his maw's mighty worried 'bout him."

"But I thought you was the one that wanted to go over and mop up the Germans months ago?" I suggested.

"So I would if I wa'n't so old," says Scott. "But Buck—well, he's the only boy we got and —and there's plenty of others that wants to go."

"Oh," says I. "You're willin' other people should send their boys, but you want to keep yours safe at home, eh?"

"His maw's takin' on terrible," says Scott. "She—she thought maybe you could git him a job in th' Nut and Bolt Works, so he wouldn't be took."

"Nothing doing, Scott," says I. "First place, he couldn't hold down a job a week there, and you know it. Besides, the best thing that could happen to a young husk like Buck would be to be taken into the army."

"His maw don't want him to go into them trenches," whines Scott. "She's shore he'd git shot to pieces right off."

"Oh, maybe he wouldn't," says I. "Any-

how, he's got a right to take his chances with the others."

That don't end it, though. Next evenin' just before dinner up comes Mrs. Scott Kinney herself for an interview with Sadie. She's a tall, rangy female, Mrs. Scott, and what you might call a sloppy dresser, even for the marshes. Mostly her costume consists of a blue polka dot dress that's turned purple in spots, and on her greasy black hair is a battered old lid with some straggly feathers trailin' limp over one ear. It's the first time, too, that I ever knew of her leavin' the shack. Too proud I expect. But this seems to be a special occasion.

She starts in quiet enough, beggin' Sadie to do something to keep her boy out of the draft, but it ain't long before she's cuttin' loose with the sob stuff, clawin' Sadie about the knees and otherwise registerin' deep emotion in reg'lar Third Avenue style. Course it's kind of embarrassin' for both of us, for Sadie feels a good deal as I do about that sort of thing. She tries to soothe her down by tellin' her that maybe Buck's number won't be drawn, and that if it is there's a chance he'll have flat feet or something to keep him out.

"Besides," Sadie goes on, "your son will not be the only one. Think of the thousands and thousands of others who must go, boys whose mothers think quite as much of them as you do

of yours. Your brother-in-law's boy may have to go."

"I hope t' Gawd he does," sniffles Mrs. Scott.

It wasn't a nice exhibition. All the crude raw selfishness of a crude, selfish woman came to the top, like scum on a boiling pot. But underneath must have been something that got to Sadie. Because they was both mothers, I expect. Anyway, before she left I'd promised to do what I could for Bucky boy.

Well, I got him the job. But it didn't save Buck. There'd been too much of that bomb-proof job huntin' goin' on about then and the Board was wise to it. Then days later he was marched off in a squad with a yellow ticket tied to his coat lapel. And Tubby Kinney was in the same bunch.

I don't know whether the Bruce Kinneys felt as bad over it or not. They didn't do any takin' on to us, anyway. But when I lugged down the two parcels that Sadie had made up for the boys I found fat Mrs. Bruce Kinney slumped with her head between her beefy arms on the kitchen table and her pale blue eyes all bloodshot. She thanked me choky, but that's all she had to say.

"You wouldn't think somehow," I remarks to Sadie, "that they'd take it so hard, folks like that."

"I'm afraid it's something all mothers share

in common," says Sadie, "only some of us manage to hide it better than others."

Later on Sadie sent down a couple of service flags and from the top of each little shack they floated, just as brave and snappy as them from the big houses along the Post Road. It was mighty interestin', too, to see the change a few weeks in camp could make in Buck Kinney. Why, when he come back on his first leave and I saw this straight-backed, square-shouldered young soldier swellin' around town I hardly knew him for the slouchy young pool-hound that had shuffled off with the draftee squad a month or so before.

"Well, Buck," says I, "you sure look like a reg'lar Hun swatter now."

He grins pleased. "Believe me, Professor," says he, "if I ever git near enough I'm goin' to git me one of them square-heads all by myself. I'll git him right, too."

"That's the stuff, Buck," says I. "And how's Tubby comin' on?"

"Him?" says Buck. "Oh, I d'now. All right, I expect."

"But he's in the same company, ain't he?" says I. "You ain't still keepin' up the old feud, are you?"

Buck scrapes his toe sheepish. "We—we don't have no truck with one another," says he.

And I was almost as much jarred when I

saw Tubby in his uniform for the first time. They'd drilled about twenty pounds off him, I should judge. He didn't waddle when he walked, and that pasty, rubber-collar complexion of his had been tinted up by the sun and wind until his round face looked like the bottom of a copper pan. Him and his father paraded around town all one Saturday afternoon, and the followin' Sunday mornin' was one of the few, I'll bet, when Bruce didn't wake up with a hang-over.

It was after this bulletin came from camp about how Bucky had been made a corporal though, that Scott begun to show signs of sprucin' up. When he holds me up to tell me about it I notice that he's shed the hip rubber boots for a pair of new canvas sneakers, that he's had a shave, and that his breath don't remind one of the lee side of a distillery.

"Whaddye know about that!" says he. "Corporal! Guess that's goin' some, ain't it? Maybe he'll be a major by the time he gits home."

"There's no telling," says I.

Next I know Scott has quit the fish and clam business and has gone to work steady in a shipyard. He always was handy with tools, but when I heard how much he was pullin' down a week it got a gasp out of me. It wasn't long either, before Bruce Kinney has followed suit

by gettin' a job in a machine shop that was turnin' out airplane parts.

And say, the way them two Kinney families proceeded to bloom out! First thing they splurged on was music machines, and from then on you could hear jazzy melodies floatin' over the marshes 'most any time of day or night. Before long Scott had invested in a little speed boat, to run back and forth to the shipyard in, while Bruce blows himself to a second-hand motor cycle with one of these wife-killin' attachments that he could hook on the side. And Sundays and Saturday afternoons while one family was chuggin' around the Sound in the launch, the other was scootin' and bumpin' over the Post Road. It was some sight, too, to see all five of the Bruce Kinneys stowed in and draped onto that motor cycle, Mrs. Bruce billowin' up and down alongside, the baby in a basket on the handle bars, and an American flag wavin' over the lot.

But with all these changes they didn't mix a bit more than they had before. Not even when the word come, along in October, that the two boys had been loaded into a transport and been shipped across. Durin' the weeks that followed I expect they was just as anxious as any of our swell neighbors whose boys was lieutenants or captains but was runnin' the same risk of bein' sent to the bottom by U-boats.

Course, these people began to get cables, but nothing like that came through from Buck or Tubby.

At last, though, Bruce comes speedin' into the yard one evenin' on his bone-shaker all excited. They'd had a letter. Not being much of a descriptive writer Tubby hadn't said much in it. Mainly he told how good the grub was on the transport and what a whale of a big steamer he was on. Incidentally, though, he'd mentioned that they was safe in a rummy lookin' port and was about to land.

"Isn't that perfectly splendid news!" says Sadie. "I suppose your brother has heard from his boy, too?"

Bruce hunches his shoulders and says he don't know.

"Do you mean you haven't told him about getting this?" demands Sadie.

Bruce admits that he hasn't.

"How thoroughly heartless!" says Sadie. "Then I shall go down and tell him at once."

Bruce sort of hangs his head but he don't make any move towards ditchin' the feud. Neither would Scott, though Sadie gives both families an earful as to what she thinks of 'em. They don't seem ugly about it any more. They're just content to let things drift along as they'd been goin' for so many years.

So it was that way all winter. First one

fam'ly would get a letter, then the other, but there was no comparin' of notes or swappin' news.

"How silly of them!" says Sadie. "When they might be of so much help and comfort to each other."

"I expect it's the old Kinney strain comin' out," says I. "Way back there must have been a grandfather with long ears."

Then along towards last spring, you know, we begun to take a personal interest in the casualty lists. I got in the habit of glancin' through the names every day. But somehow when I first run across this item under the "Wounded in Action" line I didn't quite take it in. "'Marvin J. Kinney,'" I reads, "'Rockhurst, N. Y.' Why, why—Sadie!" I sings out. "Come look at this."

"Why, that's Tubby!" she gasps. "I wonder if Bruce Kinney knows?"

It didn't take us long to get into the little roadster and shoot down there. And Bruce had heard. The telegram from the War Department had come that afternoon, while he was off at work, and now he was sittin' there starin' at it under the kitchen lamp, with the whole fam'ly gathered around sort of dumb and scared.

"Yes," says he. "They—they got Tubby."

Well, we soothed 'em down as much as we could, tellin' 'em how ninety per cent of the

wounded got patched up again as good as new, and suggestin' that maybe it wasn't serious, after all. But Bruce shakes his head gloomy. He knew they'd got Tubby.

"He was a good boy, too," says Bruce, still starin' dry-eyed at the message. Then he adds, "Damn them Huns!"

Must have been two or three days later that we had a call from Scott Kinney, right in the middle of our dinner. He brings in an evenin' paper, one that I hadn't read careful, and points to a few lines at the bottom of the war news.

"Jest read that," says he, in kind of a shaky voice.

Which I does. "'Corporal Roland B. Kinney.' Why, that's your Bucky, ain't it?" says I.

He nods. "Go on," says he.

"Well," says I, "he's got the D.S.C."

"It's a cussed shame, too," breaks out Scott. "I thought they didn't let them boys booze much in th' army."

"No, no," says I. "You got it all wrong, Scott. Not the D.T.'s. This is the D.S.C.—Distinguished Service Cross. He's pulled something heroic. Understand? You didn't read it all. 'For exceptional bravery during recent action on the Toul sector.' Good work! Bully for Buck. Rockhurst will be proud of him."

I guess I got it through his head at last but

he's still kind of vague about it. He wants to know if there ain't any way of findin' out just what it was Bucky had done. Couldn't I ask someone in Washington?

As it happens, I could. And for a wonder the query didn't get lost in the red tape. In less'n a week I had a fairly full report of the whole affair, and when Sadie had read it, too, we just sat and gazed at each other for a couple of minutes without sayin' a word.

She's the first one to break the spell. "Imagine," says she. "Those two!"

"Well, we got to tell 'em," says I.

So this time we pays a visit to the shanty on the north side of the creek, and when we'd got Mr. and Mrs. Scott Kinney planted side by side in the new red porch settee I springs the news on 'em.

"It was this way, Scott," says I. "Company F had been holdin' a bridge end, with the Huns comin' at 'em strong. Along about dusk it got too hot and they had to beat it back across the bridge, blowin' it up after 'em. About an hour later Corporal Kinney—which is your Buck—discovers that one of his men is missin'. He'd been posted with a machine gun in a little clump of bushes and the Corporal had noticed him there just before the retreat. He'd waved him to come in, too. But he hadn't come. What does Bucky do, though, but streak it right back

to the river, where the shells and bullets was churnin' up the water, swim across, scout around the opposite bank, and come back luggin' that missin' private on his shoulder. The man had been plugged pretty bad but he was still alive, and from late bulletins was gettin' well fast. Classy work, eh?''

Mr. and Mrs. Scott glances at one another shy and smiles sort of proud.

''There's one curious thing I ain't got to yet,'' I goes on. ''Who do you suppose it was that Bucky brought back through all that mess?''

''Anybody we know?'' asks Scott.

''Not very well, I guess,'' says I. ''It was Tubby.''

''Hell!'' says Scott.

Mrs. Scott hadn't said a word up to then. She'd been sittin' there kind of workin' her fingers nervous. All of a sudden, though, she gets up and gazes across the creek.

''Come, Scott,'' says she, husky. ''Let's—let's go over.''

Sadie and I didn't leave, either, until we'd seen 'em paddle across and disappear in the shack opposite.

''Well,'' says Sadie, ''I rather think that's where the Kinney feud comes to an end.''

''Maybe,'' says I. ''But my guess is that it saw its finish over in France.''

IV

A SIDE BET ON BART

If I hadn't got this sudden hunch about wantin' to bore holes, I expect Bart and me would have been strangers to this day. You see, I was puttin' up a new piece of apparatus in the Physical Culture Studio, and there was a couple of bolts that needed to go through a 2 x 4. What I should have done was to call up the janitor, tip him half a dollar, and had the thing fixed right away.

Must have been that glimpse into Spratt's hardware store, over on Sixth Avenue, that set me off. It's a weakness of mine, gawpin' into hardware store windows. Let me get one glance at a lot of shiny new tools, and the next thing I know I'm ranged up alongside with my nose against the glass, like a kid outside a candy shop.

Not that I'm any expert at usin' such things. I don't suppose I could qualify as a saw-and-hatchet man on an army barracks contract. But every now and then I'm tempted by some display, and add another chisel or a new saw or a

patent drill to the collection of weapons I'm apt to use when the wood-butcherin' fit is on me strong.

This time it was a set of bits, a whole dozen of 'em, put up neat in a varnished box. I didn't know the size of the bolts I wanted to bore the holes for, but I took a chance that one of these bits would be just right, and breezed into the store.

"Gimme a set like that in the window," says I to the clerk.

"Set of what?" says he, sort of crisp.

"Why," says I, "a set of what you got there."

"There's two windows," he comes back. "We got wrenches in one and——"

"Say, if your feet don't hurt you too much," says I, "step outside and I'll point 'em out. It'll save time. Now look: this window, third from the end, second row up."

"Oh!" he grunts. "Babcock's A 6's. Why didn't you say so?"

"Because it ain't my job to know the hardware catalogue by heart," says I. "Don't have to show a union card to buy tools, do I? or a water-front permit?"

"Huh!" says he, gettin' busy with the wrappin' paper.

"Oh, by the way," I goes on, "I expect I'll have to have a bit-stock, too."

"What kind?" says he.

"Hennessy's Three Star," says I offhand.

"Eh?" says he, starin' stupid.

"Or a Timkins double-thrust," I adds. "It don't matter which."

I had him goin' then. He begins walkin' up and down behind the counter, pullin' out drawers and shuttin' 'em, and mutterin' to himself, while I stands back and watches him. Odd lookin' gink he is. Face like a sheep. Honest! One of these long, pointed noses, and the rest of his map taperin' away on both sides, with bat ears that stick straight out from his head. And his face seems to have a permanent straw-b'ry tint to it, like he was sufferin' from a chronic grouch.

I'd just decided that we was quits, and was goin' to call the hunt off by tellin' him I wasn't any connoisseur of bit-stocks, when a big full-faced, grizzly-haired gent appears from the back office—the boss, evidently—and demands snappy of the clerk what he's lookin' for. The sheep-faced one mumbles something about bit-stocks.

"What!" growls the big gent, glarin' hostile at the clerk. "Why, you mush-brained fat-head! Been here fifteen years and don't know where we keep the bit-stocks! Say, hanged if you don't grow fooler and fooler every——"

"My fault," I breaks in. "I was just kiddin'

him along by askin' for a brand I'd made up."

"Then he should have had sense enough to know it," says the boss. "Here, you! Show the gentleman that Spencer ratchet. There, right under your nose, you numskull!"

Course that was kind of raw stuff to pull right before a customer, and I felt sort of mean about lettin' the poor fish in for it. When the big gent had drifted back to the office, I says as much, too.

"Oh, that's nothing," says the clerk. "It would have been something or other, anyhow. That's what I get right along. It's what I've always got—always will, I expect. I'm used to bein' bawled out by old Spratt."

"Must be in love with your job, then," says I.

"Say," says he, leanin' over the counter and whisperin' hoarse, "I'll tell you something. There's only one thing in the world I hate worse 'n my job. That's old man Spratt."

"Then if I was you I'd quit 'em both," says I.

"Oh, would you?" says he.

With that he goes on doin' up the parcels. When he comes back with the change for a ten, he seems to have a new idea. He suggests that if my place ain't too far away he'll bring the things around when he goes out to lunch. As I was bound for a chop-house myself, I gave him the number and said he might.

When I got back to the Studio about one-

thirty, there is Sheep-face waitin' for me with the goods.

"I been thinkin' of what you said about quittin'," says he.

"Ye-e-es?" says I.

"And I got a good mind to do it, too," he goes on.

"What a reckless daredevil you are!" says I. "Accordin' to your own account, you've stood Spratt's rough stuff for years, never dreamin' of cuttin' loose until some stranger drops in and gives you the idea. Huh! Say, I'll bet you five to one you don't. Come!"

"I—I ain't a bettin' man," says he, droppin' his chin and shufflin' his feet.

And say, come to size him up close, he's about as cheap a lookin' specimen as you'd run across. It shows in his face, in the way his shoulders slump, in the nervous trick he has of twiddlin' his fingers when he talks.

"I see," says I. "The main thing you want is to do a little safe beefin' about your boss. Eh? Well, seein' how I helped pull down this last blast, I guess I can stretch the willin' ear for a few minutes. Go on. Works out his disposition on you, does he?"

"It ain't so much what he says," grumbles the gent, "it's the way he looks at me, like I was a yellow dog he wanted to kick into the corner. Why, there's times when he don't

speak to me for days at a stretch. And only him and me left in the store now. There used to be five or six of us—more than that when I first came; but since the neighborhood has changed so much business has fallen off, and they've been let go, one by one."

"You managed to stick, though," I suggests.

"Because I got the lowest pay of any," says he, "and did the most work. Besides, I was the one he could always cuss out when he felt like it. He didn't begin that until after I got married and he thought I wouldn't dare leave on account of the wife. That's the kind he is—a big-mouthed bully."

"Oh, come!" says I. "Spratt didn't strike me as bad as all that."

"You don't know him," says the clerk. "He's mean clear through. And he thinks he's so much better than I am. Treats me like I was dirt under his feet. Why? Tell me that, will you? Because he's my boss and I'm only hired help? Or just because he's got more money than I have? Say, if it hadn't been for a little slip-up, years ago, it might have been the other way round. Yes, sir. I might have had enough to buy and sell old Spratt four times over."

"You don't say!" says I, a bit curious. "How was that?"

"I got a rich uncle out in Michigan," says he.

"He brought me up, was goin' to leave me his pile and all that, only—well, I got in a scrape. I was runnin' with kind of a swift crowd of young fellows then. They got me into a poker game, and I lost a lot of money, more'n I could pay. They—they made me sign his name to a check."

"Bad business," says I, shakin' my head.

"It was only for thirty dollars," says he, "but what made Uncle Zeb so wrathy was when he found out I'd lost it at poker, instead of bein' robbed, as I told him. You know, he's one of the religious kind, deacon and all that; but he had an awful temper. And swear! I thought he was goin' to skin me alive that night, him and me locked in a room alone. It was along in March, and a young blizzard goin' on; but when he got through lammin' me around, he threw me out into the snow as careless as if I'd been a rat or something. I was about all in then, and he warned me if I didn't clear out, or ever came back, he'd finish the job."

"Some uncle, I should call that," says I. "You cleared out, eh?"

"You bet I did," says he. "I knew one of the brakemen on the night freight, and when it came along he let me crawl into the caboose. By morning I was halfway to Detroit. Many a time since I've wished I'd dropped in a drift that night and had it all over with."

"You look like you'd been up against it, Mr. —er—what's the name?" I asks.

"Nurn," says he.

"Eh?" says I. "Once more with that. Spell it."

"N—u—r—n," says he. "Bartholomew Nurn."

"It's a perfect fit," says I. "But we might as well have the rest of this tragedy of yours, Bartholomew. After gettin' yourself Simon Legreed by Uncle Zeb, how'd you come to pike for New York and pick out a boss like Spratt?"

"I didn't, right away," says Nurn. "It was four or five years before I landed here. I was just driftin' around. Seems like I never did anything by plan. Things just happened to me. I got jobs here and there, but I couldn't seem to stick. Then I'd have to move on. I never was very strong, so lots of the work I tackled was too hard for me. Some of them gang foremen used me pretty rough, too. One broke my jaw with a punch of his big fist. Another hit me with a shovel. I was in the hospital three weeks after that, in Buffalo.

"A couple of times I came near starving. Once was right here in New York, over in Bryant Park. I could show you the very bench. That was when big Pat Scully found me. He used to be a porter at Spratt's. He picked me

up, fed me a beef stew, and got me the job. That's how I come to be there now."

"But you went and got married," I puts in. "Did that on your own motion, I expect?"

"Ye-e-es, in a way," says Bart. "It was like this: Backin' up to the rear of Spratt's used to be a restaurant. Luella, she worked there, washin' dishes. We used to see each other at odd times. She wasn't much to look at, any more'n me, but we kind of got acquainted. She didn't have any folks, either, and she was havin' a rough deal, too. We told each other, swapped our troubles, as you might say, and I suppose we felt sorry for one another. I don't remember which one of us it was said the word, but first thing I knew we was married and livin' in a couple of back rooms over on Eighth Avenue. We're there now."

"Any kids?" I asks him.

Bart shakes his head. "I don't know how we'd have fed 'em or taken care of 'em if there had been any," says he. "I don't even know what'll become of us if I quit the store or old Spratt takes a notion to close up, as he threatens. I'm over forty now, and not very well. My stomach ain't right; I have dizzy spells. And Luella couldn't do much. We—we —well, you see how it is."

I nods. I was beginnin' to squirm over some of the brash things I'd said to Nurn.

Poor cuss! Life hadn't been much of a picnic for him. No wonder he had that cheap look on his face.

"Never heard any more from Uncle Zeb?" I asks.

"Never tried," says he. "I don't even know whether he's still livin' or not. He was mighty tough when I left."

"How would it be," says I, "if you was to write him a letter, sayin' you was sorry for that bad break you made when you was a youngster, but how you'd lived straight ever since, and what a tough time you'd had? Give him the whole tale, as you've put it to me—about Luella and all."

Bartholomew stares at his shabby shoes a minute or so; then he lifts them shifty eyes of his.

"I don't believe it would do any good," says he. "He was a hard man—Uncle Zeb. Great one to keep a grudge. Besides, maybe he's dead."

"It wouldn't cost much to try it on," says I. "He might do a little something for you."

"I ain't ever begged from anybody," says Nurn. "Not a cent."

"I wouldn't call this beggin', exactly," says I. "If there was nobody else for him to leave his money to, you got a right to come in for some of it, anyway. Why not take a chance?"

"I—I'll talk it over with Luella," says he. "Much obliged, Professor McCabe. You—you don't know how much good it's done me to—to tell somebody."

And say, blamed if them narrow-set eyes ain't leakin' as he turns and drifts out. Swifty Joe, who always has an ear stretched and an eye squinted, slides in from the gym just then.

"I tried givin' that skate the steer," says he, "but he wouldn't have it. Did he work a touch on you?"

"Not yet," says I.

"He will if he ain't blocked off," says Swifty. "He's no good, that one, believe me."

Just to ease my mind, I dropped in to see Spratt next day while Bart was out hittin' the lunch-counter, and registered my alibi for him a little stronger. I explains how it was that Nurn was chasin' around foolish when he came in, and says I wouldn't want to feel I'd got him canned or anything.

"Oh, him!" says Spratt, hunchin' his shoulders. "Never fear. I'm through trying to fire him. He always comes begging back, so what's the use? The only way I can get rid of him is to close up shop—or die, I suppose."

He grins as he says it, and I knew then he wasn't half so bad as Bartholomew had tried to make out. He's one of these husky, hearty old boys, Spratt, with no patience at all for weak-

lings such as Nurn, and he takes no pains to hide it.

Well, it must have been a fortnight afterwards when, one noon, Bartholomew comes scuffin' into the front office with his face all flushed an' his little eyes twitchin'.

"Say, Professor," he begins, "you lost that bet. I've quit him, cold."

"Eh?" says I. "Oh! Spratt, you mean?"

"Yes, sir," says he. "But you were right about Uncle Zeb. I've heard from him. Thought I was dead all these years. I expect, too, he figured he'd done it. Anyway, he says he's worried a lot. Wants me to come on and see him. Sent me a hundred to do it on. What do you know about that?" And he waves a letter.

"Well, well!" says I. "And your first move, I suppose, was to hand old Spratt a few crisp remarks?"

Bartholomew scowls a bit.

"I sure meant to," says he, "but somehow I —I didn't say much except that I was through."

"Yes?" says I. "What does Spratt have to say to that jolt?"

"Ah, he only growls something about good riddance—the old sorehead!" says Nurn. "Thinks I'll come sneakin' around again tomorrow. He'll see. We're off for Michigan tonight—me and Luella. We may not come back,

either. I shouldn't wonder but Uncle Zeb would let us stay."

"Then here's hopin'," says I, givin' him the grip. "And the best of luck."

Let's see, that was some time before Christmas. And in a month I'd almost forgotten there was such a person as Bartholomew Nurn. I expect if I'd gone shoppin' again for carpenter's tools I might have remembered. But I didn't. So here the other mornin', when Swifty tells me about this early 'phone call from the Plutoria and says it's a party from Michigan who left the message, all I can do is scratch my ear, puzzled.

"Yes, but what was the name?" I asks.

"Sounded like Burns," says Swifty. "Said he'd be waitin' in the lobby. He wants you to come up for lunch."

"Oh, very well," says I. "Anybody that wants to see me that bad ought to be accommodated, hadn't they?"

So about twelve-thirty I chases up to this dollar-a-minute joint, and lets the guy in the rear-admiral's uniform shunt me through the plate-glass merry-go-round. Then I strolls past rows of palms—*dustosa cigarbuttis* variety—and wanders through lanes of high-backed chairs, scoutin' for someone who might look like his name was Burns. Nobody give me the glad hail, though, or presents me with a meal ticket,

and I was wonderin' if Swifty hadn't got the name of the place wrong when I sees a pair of ears that looked sort of familiar.

They're round bat ears, and they're juttin' out from under the edge of a black and white plaid cap that would have made a good checkerboard. No, I was sure I didn't know anybody who had nerve enough to wear a cap like that anywhere except at a polo match or a bull fight. Besides, the gent is attached to one of these oatmeal terriers by a leather lead. Still, I was sure I'd seen them ears before as well as behind. I steps along until I gets a side view. And there's that sheep-shaped face. It's Bartholomew.

"For the love of soup!" says I, swingin' him round by the arm and givin' him the up-and-down, from the new yellow shoes to the Clan MacLaren tie. "Tell me, who's done this to you?"

"Oh!" says he, beamin' friendly as he spots me. "Hello, Professor. Got my message, did you?"

"But listen, Bart," I goes on. "What's happened? You sportin' around in a joint like this, makin' a noise like excess profits! How the blazes can——"

"I found Uncle Zeb," says he.

"Oh!" says I. "How was the old boy?"

"Very low," says Bartholomew. "He lasted

only ten days after we got there. And what do you think, McCabe? He left me the whole pile —every dollar."

"Whe-e-ew!" says I. "How much?"

"I wouldn't dare guess," says he. "The lawyers ain't figured it all up yet. But there's a lot—real estate, mortgages, bank stock, all kinds of bonds, and cash. You see, there wasn't another relation left, and after the way he'd treated me—— Well, he'd had the will made out for years. Anyway, I got enough, I guess, to get what I want."

"I see," says I, grinnin'. "And I take it your first want was some sport-cut clothes."

Bartholomew looks sort of pleased.

"I never had anything but cheap black suits all my life—the kind that turn green and rusty," says he. "I never did believe in this mournin' stuff, either. And say, how do I look in 'em?"

"Great!" says I. "Why, you look—well, like you'd been oversubscribed."

"Huh!" says he, swellin' out his chest. "You ought to see Luella. Come on. She's waitin' for us in the Egyptian parlor."

Yes, Luella was worth seein'. I wished then I'd known her before they found Uncle Zeb, so I could have appreciated the change. But I could guess. The modistes and milliners and beauty doctors hadn't been able to camouflage

that heavy kitchen-help face of hers, or the dull eyes. They'd done their best with what they could reach, though. Her mud-colored hair had been through the henna treatment and tortured into the latest shape. She had jewelry hung on her and pinned to her until she looked like a munition worker's bride. The waist of her dress began just under her arm-pits and stopped about eighteen inches from the floor. Poor soul! She had a sort of pleadin', scared look in her eyes that told the whole story. It would be some time before she got used to appearin' in costumes like that.

As for Bartholomew, he was makin' a desperate stab at playin' the lordly plute. But he almost apologizes to the bell-hop he asks to take care of the terrier when we starts for the white-and-gold dinin'-room. It's two or three minutes before he can get a head waiter to see him. He shies at the silver-framed menu-card like he'd been handed a bomb, and when the bus-boy fills his water glass he says, "Much obliged," and then giggles nervous. I helps him out by suggestin' what we shall have for lunch.

When we gets to the black coffee, though, and he lights a forty-cent cigar, Bartholomew begins to buck up. He shoves back a dollar tip at the waiter and demands an ash-tray real rough.

"I ain't told you the big news yet," says he, waggin' his head.

"Let it come," says I.

He looks over at Luella and winks.

"About Spratt," says he.

"What!" says I. "You've been around and unloaded your mind?"

"Better'n that," says Bart. "I've bought him out."

"You don't mean it!" says I.

"Uh-huh!" says he. "I'm the proprietor now. I'm runnin' the store. Spratt—well, Spratt's workin' for me."

You could see the buttons strain on his vest.

"Say," says I, chucklin', "that's gettin' back at him. Got him right under your thumb now, I expect, makin' him squirm!"

Bartholomew nods.

"Course," he goes on, "I don't need to bother with any such picayune business as that. I wanted to, that's all. It don't pay. Not now. I can make it pay, though. I always had a lot of good ideas that Spratt would never listen to. He'll listen now, I guess. You bet he will. I ain't sprung 'em on him yet. But wait. I'm goin' to change the whole thing—put in a line of electric light and bath-room stuff, shift the counters all round, hire a lot of clerks, and make things hum. You'll see. And say, when I get it all planned out I want you to drop around some day—I'll tip you off when—and hear me

tell Spratt what's what and where he gets off. Will you?"

I said I'd be delighted. Well, the word came yesterday. I was there. Some of the new force was on hand, also a contractor who was goin' to juggle the fixtures.

"See here," says Nurn, struttin' important, "I want this side counter run across the middle, right here."

"Why," breaks in Spratt, "that would spoil the whole effect. Now, what we want——"

"We?" comes in Nurn, gaspy.

"Say, Bart," protests Spratt, droppin' a heavy paw friendly on his shoulder, "you know you're no more of a business man than you're a he-angel. Now, just leave this to me. I'll tell McCarty how to fix it."

"But the bath-room stuff," says Nurn.

"Bah!" says Spratt. "This is a hardware store, not a plumber's shop. Forget it. What we need to put in for this trade is a full line of cheap junk—tack-hammers, glass knobs, patent cork-pullers, picture-hangers—all that. Anything that can be used in a flat or an office. I had it all thought out years back, and I'll make a go of it for you. All you got to do is keep out. Now run along while I tell McCarty what to do."

Bartholomew didn't run. Not quite. He

stood there, openin' and shuttin' his mouth and twiddlin' his fingers.

"But see here, Spratt," he begins; "I——"

"Oh, don't bother me now," says Spratt, brushin' him one side as he starts to tow McCarty to the office.

Then Bartholomew looks up and sees me standin' there. He don't say a word until he's joined me and we've fetched the sidewalk.

"It's no use, I expect," says he. "He's still old Spratt, and I—I'm just Nurn. I'm the boss, though, really. I ain't goin' to let him forget that."

"That's talkin'!" says I.

Yes and that's about all it was. I ain't spillin' any sympathy for Bartholomew Nurn, though. He owns a dog now; and some day, after he gets a little more used to 'em, he's goin' to look a head waiter square between the eyes.

V

GUESSING WRONG ON HERM

I AIN'T makin' any excuses for knowin' Herm Fickett, nor I ain't boastin' about it. Some would think they had to do one, while some couldn't resist doin' the other. As for me, I've always classed Herm Fickett as sort of a human curio; nothing you'd want to have around constant, or put in a parlor collection, but a specimen that was worth inspectin' now and then when there was nothing better to do.

That's how I happened to be ranged up alongside of him in the lobby of the Ouija Gardens that evenin' when this delegate from the clam chowder sector drifts in and proceeds to turn the spotlight on Herm's shadowy past.

Not that I'm any surprised to learn he has such a thing. Anyone would know he had just to look at him. Yet while I've been more or less well acquainted with Herm Fickett for say a dozen years I didn't know much more about his past than I did his future.

Let's see, it must have been durin' that last exhibition tour of mine that my manager picked

him up, either in Kansas City or Denver, and put him in the box office to check up the gate receipts for our side. Seems to me he'd been treasurer, so called, of one of them punk burlesque shows that had gone on the rocks. Anyway, he was such a seedy lookin' party that I insisted on his havin' enough so he could spruce up a little. And what does he blow a two weeks' stake against but a second-hand soup-and-fish outfit includin' a foldin' opera hat two sizes too big.

Maybe he wasn't grateful, though. For it turns out that Herm's abidin' weakness is for open face clothes. He was always perfectly willing to rustle his chow from basement beaneries, go without smokes or drinks, or bunk at any third-class joint, without ever puttin' up a holler. And by day he'd slouch around in some old plaid suit that was mostly wrinkles and grease spots. Come lightin'-up time though, and Mr. Herman Fickett was bound to appear in all the glory of pearl studs and braid-bound dinner coat, no matter whether he was behind the ticket window of the Chicago Auditorium or squeezed into the dough coop of the skating rink at Red Wing.

You'd think it was what he lived for, this evenin' costume act of his. Maybe it was. Anyway, he has always stuck to it. Even when he drifts into New York some six or eight years

back, so near broke that a fifty cent room at a Mills hotel was all he could afford, he continues to bloom out in the usual regalia.

Maybe that was why I took a chance on backin' him in this pool room and bowling alley enterprise he'd found so far uptown on the West Side. I must admit it didn't look good to me, for that end of Broadway was mostly new apartment buildings then, with the tenants only beginning to trickle in. But Herm was dead sure if he could put up enough to take over a five-year lease and hold on until the district filled up he'd develop something big.

Well, he did. Inside of six months he'd changed the bowlin' alley into a movie house and fitted up the pool parlor as a grill room. Within a year he'd negotiated a license and leased the vacant lot in the rear for a beer garden.

And that was the start of the Ouija Gardens. Maybe you know the place now, with its blazin' electric sign, its four floors and its thirty piece orchestra. I expect you can get just as poor a dinner there for $1.25 as at any joint in town. And afterwards you can climb up to the Cherry Blossom roof and watch as crude a program of vaudeville and pictures as you can stand. If you ain't satisfied then you can join the mob out in the white latticed back yard and tackle a leathery Welsh rabbit or defy ptomaines by

consumin' a chicken lobster that's been away from salt water for a month or more.

I should worry, though. The few hundred I kissed good-by when I handed 'em over to Herm Fickett so long ago have come back to me a good many times since, and although I've tried to tell him he could buy in my fifth interest any time he wanted, Herm will never listen.

"Ah, let it ride, Shorty," is all I ever get out of him.

So every now and then, when I'm spendin' a lonesome evenin' in town, I hop on the subway and slip up to join Herm for an hour or so while he stands there watchin' the crowds pour in. His favorite spot seems to be just in the lee of a Charlie Chaplin display board. If you ever saw him once you'd know him again. Uh-huh! That's him—the squatty party with the short neck, the long arms, the puffy little eyes and the round smooth face with a complexion like a Camembert cheese or a rubber collar.

So it can't be personal vanity that leads Herm out there night after night. Hardly! I expect he don't know how much like a dressed-up toad he looks; or if he does he don't care. But there you'll find him, planted solid on his short legs, with them little eyes fixed steady on the crowd. He don't seem to be watchin' for anybody special, and he never turns to follow any of 'em, but I'll bet there's none he misses.

You'd never guess either, that he was boss of the whole outfit unless you'd stayed with him a while, as I do. Then you'd see, from time to time, people sidle up to him and whisper things in his ear. Sometimes it's the stage manager hurryin' out to report a break in the program, or a head waiter gettin' advice on whether some young sport is good for credit on a dinner bill, or more often some grafter tryin' out his touch for D. H. tickets. And they all get their decisions prompt, too. It's either a nod, or a shake of the head, or he'll stop to scribble his initials on a pass. Now and then they get to his roll and you'll see him peel off a five or a ten and slip it to 'em casual.

I grieve to state also, that a lot of 'em are fluffs; some just Broadway flappers, only beginning to use lip-sticks and eyebrow pencils, while others are bold-faced Janes with henna on their hair and a hard look in their eyes. And most of them men, too, are a sousy looking lot; gamblers, gun fighters, ward heelers and the like, if I'm any judge. How well Herm knows 'em it's hard to say, for nothing shows on that leathery face of his, or in the steady eyes. They all seem to know him, though.

So it's no wonder I edge off and ask no questions afterwards. Even if I am sort of a silent partner of his in this Ouija Gardens enterprise, I don't feel exactly responsible for Herm

Fickett's present any more'n I do for his past. He can't be much worse than he looks, and if he's any better he conceals it successful. All I'm sure of is that I've always found him strictly sober and tendin' to business, and when it comes to settlin' a deal, as straight as a plumb line.

On this particular evenin' I must have been standin' there with Herm for near an hour, neither of us sayin' much, but just holdin' the bridge, as you might say, when all of a sudden this stray Rube drifts up and starts lookin' us over sort of undecided. He's a tall, lanky, loose-jawed party with a droopin' lip whisker and a slouch to his shoulders. And from the blue cotton shirt and the brown canvas sneakers it was easy to tell he'd wandered in from the edge of the map. As I'm about to step one side to let Herm handle him he seems to make up his mind which to tackle. And it's me he picks out.

"Your name's Fickett, ain't it?" he demands.

"No such luck," says I. "This is Mr. Fickett, here."

"Huh!" says he, turnin' to Herm. "So you're the one, hey?"

Herm glances at him careless and nods. "What then?" he asks.

"I'm from Setaugus, Maine," says the stranger.

"Eh?" says Herm, turnin' on him quick.

"Thought that would git ye," says the other. "My name's Lonnie Todd. I'm Maria Todd's brother."

If he'd figured on handin' Herm a jolt he wasn't much disappointed. Anyway, I'd never seen that uneasy, restless look come into them little eyes before.

"I've come to have a talk with you about her," adds Lonnie.

You've seen these country smart Alecks, I expect. Well, Lonnie was that kind; only about the cheapest, cheekiest crossroads pill I've ever seen in action. I was lookin' for Herm to signal the big special cop he has patrollin' the front and have this Todd party given the quick run. But Herm just stands there starin' at him vacant, as if he was lookin' through and beyond him, a long ways beyond. And the next thing I knew Herm has taken me by the arm.

"Come," says he. "Let's go inside. You, too," he throws at Todd over his shoulder.

And when the three of us was in his private office he locks the door careful and proceeds to slump down into the big leather desk-chair that he fits so snug.

"I hope you don't mind, Shorty," he goes on, "but in a case like this I like to have a third party on hand."

"Sure," says I. "I expect the two of us

might handle him if he starts anything messy."

"It isn't so much that," says Fickett, "as it is hearing what he's got to say for himself, for if he's just lying——"

"Ah, you can't bluff me off that way," breaks in Lonnie. "I ain't ascairt of you, Herm Fickett, any more'n I used to be when you and the rest of the big fellers belonged to the cider mill gang."

"I give up," says Herm. "You must be Lonnie, all right. But what's the idea of your hunting me out? Did—did Maria send you?"

"You know derned well she wouldn't," comes back Todd, lettin' on to be indignant. "I'm here on my own hook, I am."

"That's interesting, too," says Herm. "How'd you get here?"

"On a lumber schooner, out of Bangor," says Todd. "I'm cook. And as we were unloadin' up in Harlem River, I sees this ad. of yours in th' paper. 'Ooey-jar Gardens, Herman Fickett, Manager,' it says. An' I says to myself, 'That's him! I'll bet a dollar it is!' Guess I win, don't I, Herm?"

Fickett nods. "And now?" he asks.

"You've come to be quite a somebody, ain't you, Herm?" says Todd, gazin' around at the mahogany desk, the pictures on the wall and finally at Fickett's broad expanse of white shirt bosom with the diamond studs in it.

"That is more'n I can say for you," counters Fickett. "But suppose I am somebody?"

"I'm gettin' to that," says Todd, leerin' suggestive as he leans forward in his chair. "You remember the little old house on the P'int, where you used to come sneakin' around to see Maria? Well, it's still there. So's Maria. Maw's dead, and paw's dead, and I ain't been to home much these last ten years. But Maria, she's stuck right there—waitin'. I guess you know who fer, Herm Fickett."

"Not—not twenty-five years?" says Herm, kind of gaspy.

"Yep," says Todd. "Jest that much of a fool, Maria was. She thought you meant it when you said you'd come back fer her."

"Eh?" says Herm, squirmin' in his chair like he'd been jabbed with a pin. "Did—did Maria tell you that?"

"She shore did," says Todd, waggin' his head. "Ain't I all the one she's got left?"

Herm gives him a disgusted glance and starts something sarcastic but chokes it off. "Do you mean," says he, "that she has been living there on the Point alone?"

Mr. Todd favors him with a nod.

"How?" demands Herm.

"Well," says Lonnie, "for a spell she cooked up at Teeter's boardin' house. Then she took to doin' washin' fer the summer people. But

mostly she gets along by makin' these picture rugs that she sells to the cottagers."

"Whaddye mean, picture rugs?" demands Herm.

"Oh, they're crazy things," says Todd. "Hooks 'em out of rags. Makes pictures in the middle. Always the same—a boat with a feller in it, and a girl standin' on the shore with her arms out, and a big moon showin' over the spruce trees. She's done dozens of 'em. The summer folks thinks they're great. She's been wrote up on account of them rugs, in the papers. They call her the picture-rug woman. But say, they don't know the whole story. I do though. The girl waitin' on the rocks is supposed to be her, and the feller who's paddlin' stiff armed towards her, but never gittin' there—well, that's you."

It's about the first time I ever saw Herm Fickett's jaw sag or them steady little eyes of his turn shifty. For a minute or so he don't say a word, and then he asks, sort of husky: "How —how do you know it was meant for me?"

Todd lets off a chuckle. "I didn't until lately," says he. "She's always been one of the close mouthed kind, Maria. But durin' this last sick turn of hers she went kind of looney in the head and all one night she kept mumblin' things, such as, 'Oh, Herm! Please come back, like you said you would. You'll know I'm waitin' if you

ever see one of my rugs. You'll understand.' Stuff like that, the whole night. That's how I know."

"When was this?" asks Herm.

" 'Bout three weeks ago," says Todd, "jest about three weeks it was. She was some better when I left. Able to git around, anyway. Some of the neighbors was lookin' out fer her. I guess she'll pull through. What I want to know though, Herm Fickett, is this: What you goin' to do fer us?"

"For us?" repeats Herm, starin' at him.

"Yep," says Todd. "Fer Maria and me."

"Huh!" says Herm, indulgin' in a hard, throaty chuckle. "I thought so! Well, Lonnie, all I intend doing for you is going to happen right now. I'm going to have you kicked off the block."

With that he reaches to one side of his desk and presses a button. Course, Mr. Todd puts up more or less of a howl, but inside of a minute the big special cop has him by the collar and is draggin' him towards the sidewalk. Herm never gives him another look as Lonnie is yanked out kickin' and splutterin'. All Mr. Fickett does is sit there gazin' at the wall, his pudgy fingers grippin' the chair arms.

Finally, he turns to me. "Well," says he, "you heard? You see the sort of skunk I am?"

I expect it wouldn't have been just the thing

to have grinned at him. But I wanted to. The idea of Herm Fickett, that I'd rated about as bad an egg as you could find along Broadway, gettin' stirred up over a little old back number romance such as he shows on the screen nearly every night! Yet I couldn't put it to him that way. So I switches to another line.

"I didn't know you was a State of Mainer, Herm," says I.

"Yep," says he. "I was born in Setaugus, same as Maria. We went to the same little red schoolhouse, two miles back in the woods. And she was a mighty fine girl, McCabe. It was all true, what Lonnie said about my promising to go back for her. I meant to do it, too, when I left, to play the drum down at Peake's Island that summer. But I—I drifted a good ways off. You know. I got mixed up with the show game. Worse than that. I had to shoot a man once—come near being stretched for it. And there's been women. Lord! One of 'em near ended me with a knife, down in Santa Fé. A Mexican girl. But that was years ago. Up here—well, what's the use? You wouldn't believe it, but late years, since I've been doing so well, I've been thinking a lot about Maria Todd, and wondering. It's kept me from—from a lot of things. Not that I'm playing myself for any saint, but I'm different from what most folks think. It's time, I suppose. I'm past fifty.

Fifty-three. Think of that, McCabe! And Maria Todd, who used to have cheeks like peaches and cream, and hair like so much sunshine—Maria'll be over fifty too. And all this time she—she's been waiting for me. Shorty, do you know what I'm going to do?"

I admitted I didn't.

"I'm going back for her," says Herm. "I'm going to-night—now."

I expect I must have gawped at him foolish. The idea of Herm Fickett as a bridegroom sort of stunned me. "Ain't it a little late, Herm?" I suggests.

"Maybe," says he. "That'll be up to her. Let's see, I can make the 11 o'clock express, can't I?"

And as I rode home that night I tried to throw up a picture of Herm coming back with a wife; most likely a faded, dried up little old maid who'd lived all her life way up on the coast of Maine, hookin' rugs, whatever that might be. How would she look sitting in the manager's box up on the Cherry Blossom roof, or taking dinner in the grill among all them flossy dressed West Siders? And what would she think of some of Herm's dizzy lady friends, or what would they think of her?

"No," says I to myself. "It can't be done."

Course, I don't mean I worried myself sick over it. I don't take things as hard as that,

'specially when they ain't any closer than this was. In a day or so about all I remembered was that Herm Fickett had started off to do something weird. And a week or ten days later, when I gets this 'phone call from him, I had to think back hard to make the connection. He wants me to come up that evenin'.

"I got something to show you," says he.

And as I hung up the receiver I lets out a groan. "I'll bet he's gone and done it!" says I.

But when I gets to the Ouija Gardens I finds Herm at his old post out front, and alone.

"Well," says I, "is it a case of wishin' you happy days?"

He shakes his head solemn.

"Oh!" says I, "she thought it was too late, eh?"

Without answerin' that he unlocks a side door and beckons me to follow him into the private office. And when he's settled himself in the big leather chair and lighted a fresh cigar he remarks: "It was too late, Shorty."

"Eh?" says I. "You don't mean she was——"

"Yes," says he. "The day before I got there. I was in time to see about the funeral and so on, but that's all. She—she'd got tired of waiting."

We didn't say anything more, either of us, for a minute or so. Then he begins again.

"But I'm glad I went," says he. "I shall always be glad I did that much. Else I wouldn't have known. Women are wonderful, Shorty; that is, some of 'em. And Maria Todd—well, I don't know as I can tell you the half. I ain't sure I quite get the whole of it myself. It—it beats hell what some women are."

Then I waits while he puffs thoughtful for a spell, until he goes on. "It was all so, Shorty," says Herm, "about her waiting, and about the picture rugs. I saw some of 'em. Just as Lonnie said. There was something else, though; something he didn't know about, nor anyone but her. Not even the neighbors across the road. They all thought she was a little cracked. But who ain't, a little?

"You see, Shorty, it was just a poor, weather-beaten little shack, snuggled in among the rocks there by the shore. A little bit of yard in front, a few flowers, a big spruce at the back. Just two rooms. One was sort of a kitchen, where she cooked and worked and slept. The front part was bigger. Kind of a parlor. She had it fixed up real nice—white curtains at the windows, some old horsehair chairs with tidies on 'em, a little parlor organ. Only her best friends was ever asked in there. She called it The Room. And across one side was hung up one of these old-fashioned blue and white bedspreads. Nobody ever guessed there was anything behind

it, until that morning when I come and one of the women was helping me fix things up for—for the funeral.

"We run across it by accident, pulled it one side. And then I saw what she'd been doing all them long winters when she'd been waitin'. It was a big thing, nearly as big as the bedspread. Another picture rug. But not like the others. This showed the little shack, not exactly as it was, but as it might be—vines and flowers all over it, smoke pourin' out of both chimneys, a neat little white fence all around, a boat pulled up on the shore. And at the gate, a man and a woman—clinched fond. She has on a white dress, and a white veil over her sunny hair. Pink roses in the veil. He is tall, and dark and swell looking. You might not guess, Shorty, but the woman was meant for her, and the man—for me. A note pinned to it said so.

"You see, she'd worked it all out—her dream of what might be. Years and years she must have worked at it, believing it would come true. And at the last, just before she gave up, she'd written the note. If I didn't come, it said, she wanted the thing put away, where nobody would see it. But if I did come, no matter when, I was to have it, and she hoped everybody in the world would see it, so they'd know she was right. Now what do you think of that, Shorty?"

I don't know just what I did say. I got out

something. It was beyond me. Besides, I was starin' at Herm Fickett. Was this the same Herm I thought I'd known?

And then all of a sudden he bangs his big fist on the desk and breaks out with: "By Gad, Shorty, they're goin' to see it, too! Come."

I follows him out into the inner lobby; and there, framed elaborate in beveled gold near a foot wide, with about a hundred hooded electric bulbs floodin' it with a blaze of light, and hung where the thousands that pour in and out can't miss it, is Maria Todd's hooked rug dream.

I don't know what they think of it, them folks who stream into Ouija Gardens to howl at custard-pie comedy and chuckle over old slap-stick acts. I guess Herm don't know either, or care. He seems satisfied.

"And every night, after the last show," he goes on, "I come in here and stand, just looking. I like to. How would it be, Shorty, to have a whackin' big vase on either side, and keep it filled with pink roses? Eh? Gad, I'll do it!"

And two weeks ago, if you'd asked me, I'd have said: "Who, Herm Fickett? Yes, he's got about as much sentiment stowed away in his system as there is sap in a lamp post."

VI

AND THEN, THERE WAS TODD

As for me, I don't know whether to be glad or sorry about what we helped Todd to do. Just how Pinckney feels about it I ain't sure, either. Course I know what he says. But what Pinckney means by what he says is something else again.

"Casuals of Kismet, Shorty; no more," says he. "We served merely as the poor pawns of the game."

"Huh!" says I, tryin' to look like I was keepin' up. "You don't say?"

And, after all, I only started the thing. Funny about me and Todd. I expect we'd seen each other day in and day out for a matter of three years or more, without either of us ever battin' an eye as we passed. There was no cause. He might of known who I was and he might not. Course, it was plain enough about him. There it was, right on his cap.

But Todd wasn't one you'd give the cheery hail to offhand and uninvited. A sour, grouchy little party. You could tell that by the sag to his mouth corners, by the furrows between his

thin, sketchy eyebrows, and by the droopy hang of his sandy, ragged mustache. Had a droop to his shoulders, too.

Well, I don't know as I'd be so chirky if I had to do a twelve-hour trick on a dinky old passenger elevator six days in the week. It's in the buildin' next to where I have my Physical Culture Studio. When he wasn't travelin' up and down in the old cage, Todd had a habit of slippin' out to the doorway, where he'd slouch just inside, scowlin' over the black bowl of his corn-cob pipe at the world in general.

I expect I got so I didn't notice him any more than the ash-cans he used to roll out to the edge of the curb mornin's.

So this time, when I finds him shakin' his fist at the broad back of the hook-nosed lady with the big sparks in her ears, I was all for brushin' by as usual. Just as I'm passin', though, he unlimbers a string of remarks.

They sure were emphatic and high-spiced remarks, but so muffled and throaty that there was no chance of her hearin' 'em. Naturally, I swings my head to look after a party who was bein' described so picturesque and uncomplimentary, and then turns to take a curious glance at Todd. Which seems to be his cue for confidin' his further emotions to me.

"The old hippopotamus!" he explodes. "Fat old swine! Look at her."

"Eh?" says I. "Annoyed about something, are you?"

"Am I?" says he. "It's a wonder I don't do murder one of these fine days, with the likes of that makin' life hard for me."

"How's that?" says I.

"Why," he snarls, "comin' down here twice a week, snoopin' around and findin' fault. Ever since she bought the buildin' it's been that way. And me holdin' the job for goin' on four years with never a cross word from the boss. But now—'Vy dond you the sidevalk sveep oop?' 'Vot is it you smoke in your dirty pipe—rubber, eh?' And threatenin' to tie the can to me every trip. Trust a woman. G-r-r-r!"

"That's right," says I. "Get it all out of your system and then maybe you'll feel better." And with a grin I leaves him to his happy thoughts.

Seems to break the ice with him, this little exchange. After that he never fails to hold me up and spill his troubles. Yes, he had a lot of 'em, mainly havin' to do with the snake-charmin' sex. It was one day when the old elevator went out of commission and the repair gang was tinkerin' it up that he finds his way up to the Studio and gives me a complete bill of complaint.

"I used to think I was a man," says he, glarin' savage at the worn-out toes of his old

shoes. "Now—— Well, I don't know what I am. It's bein' surrounded and hectored so much by old hens."

"Meanin' the fair sex?" I suggests.

"Fair be blowed!" says he. "Old hens. That Mrs. Rosenbaum, the landlady. She's a fair sample. And look at our buildin'—full of 'em. Madam Jezinski, what runs the hair shop on the second; Madam O'Bryne, robes, for another; and all them milliners and typewriters and corn doctors on the other floors. Every one ready to bawl me out any time of day. And I have to stand for it—me, Samson Todd."

"Samson, eh?" says I, sizin' up this thin-chested, squint-eyed, booze-soaked specimen of human wasp. "Ain't that kind of a misfit name for a party of your weight?"

"Maybe," says he. "Wished on me by an aunt, out of dislike. I suppose she knew I was goin' to be sickly and never get my full growth. But, for all of that, I've been a man, more or less, until I got stuck here, hoistin' women up and down all day long. Nothin' but women. You've seen. Car's always full of 'em, mostly old hens—cacklin, jabberin', jawin' old hens. And then, when I'm through at night, home among more of 'em. Yes, three more old hens at home."

"Steady, there, Todd," says I. "If you're a Mormon you shouldn't——"

"Think I'd marry one, let alone three?" he snaps.

Then he explains how he lives with a sister who's a widow and runs a boardin' house. Sister is helped out by an old maid cousin and an antique mother-in-law; and, accordin' to Todd, the combination is one that would drive a saint into the souse class.

"Jawin' and naggin'," says he, "from the minute I stick my head in the basement door at night until I sneak out in the mornin'. I'd like to quit 'em some day and never show up again."

"Well, why not?" says I.

"Eh?" says he, starin' as if I'd suggested he tackle some miracle.

"Listen, Todd," says I. "You come beefin' to me about the way you're pestered by women. You state your opinions mighty free and bold —when they can't hear you. Know what you sound like? A yellow pup yappin' down an alley. Uh-huh. Like a worthless, measly yellow pup that would run if a two-weeks-old kitten humped its back at him. Now, if you must yap, do your yappin' where it'll register. Buck up! Don't be an imitation man. If your womenfolk at home are pickin' on you, give 'em as good as they send. Tell 'em where they get off. The same with Mrs. Rosenbaum. Ten to one they'll lay off it after that. Anyway, take a chance. That is, if you got any nerve left."

He takes it without a squirm, all except that last jab. That got under his skin. I could see him stiffen and his fingers bunch up.

"You think I ain't got any nerve?" says he, gettin' on his feet. "I'll show you. And I'll show them, too."

"Yes, you will—not," says I over my shoulder, as he drifts through the door.

Maybe that was rubbin' in the salt. I didn't have anything special against Todd, the poor fish! Only I didn't want him to get the idea he could run in here and give me an earful whenever he got a call-down that he most likely deserved. And I had no more notion he'd try to follow my advice than I did of seein' him turn handsome overnight. I just threw it off casual and careless.

Must have been nearly one o'clock before I got a chance to beat it out to lunch, so as I swings onto Forty-second Street I'm in considerable of a hurry. That's how I happened to plow right into the middle of this young mob of females bunched about the next entrance before I noticed anything unusual. But by the time I'd dodged around a couple and caromed off a third into a wide, husky party in a blond transformation, I decides to slow up. It was then I heard this chorus of wild squeals and panicky shrieks floatin' out from the doorway.

"What's happenin'?" I asks an excited young lady who's hoppin' up and down.

"Oh, it's perfectly awful!" she groans. "Can't someone stop him?"

"Stop what—who?" says I.

"That wretch in the elevator," says she. "He'll kill them all—I know he will. He has the car full, and he's running it up and down like a crazy man, stopping and starting jerky, not letting them out, and swearing something frightful. They say that Madam Jezinski is in there, and that two girls from the manicure parlors have fainted, and——"

"It ain't Todd, is it?" I demands.

"I'm sure I don't know his name," says she. "It's that surly, smelly little runt with the squinty eyes—the one that's always here."

"That's him," says I. "Todd." And I does my best to smother a grin.

"They've 'phoned for the police and the owner of the building, I hear," says the young lady. "I wish they'd come before anything awful happens."

"Oh, I guess it won't," says I, "if it's only Todd."

With that I works my way out of the crowd and starts on, chucklin' a bit. So Todd had really cut loose! He was takin' it out in bouncin' around a lot of his pet enemies.

Unique way of gettin' back at 'em—and one that would most likely earn him his release. But that was his lookout.

I meant to stop on my way back and ask somebody how the affair came out; but after lunch I took my reg'lar stroll up Fifth Avenue, and ran across Pinckney cruisin' along in his town car, with the usual results. From then on all schedules was off. He insists on my climbin' in, whirls me up through the park and back, drags me into a picture exhibit on the return trip, makes a stop at one of his clubs, and lands me at the Studio again about three-thirty. Havin' nothing better to do, he says how he guesses he'll trail along in too.

"All right," says I; "but I ain't urgin' it."

"Your apology noted," says he, "and such an impulsive invitation I can scarcely resist. Ah, here is your eminent assistant, Mr. Gallagher, who seems to await you with news of import."

It's a fact. Swifty Joe is scowlin' impatient.

"Well, anything on your mind besides your hair, Swifty?" says I.

"Nah!" says he out of the southwest corner of his mouth. "But there's sumpin' on the mat you might give the once-over to when you get the time."

"Ah, ha!" says Pinckney. "A hint of mystery. Excellent!"

"Since you're so strong for that sort of thing," says I, "I'll let you in on it, whatever it is."

"Done!" says Pinckney. "Proceed to the mat."

So we files into the gym. I had to take a second glance before I places this huddled-up party with the torn coat sleeve and the rumpled hair. But as I walked around and stirred it with my foot, a pair of squinty eyes are rolled up at me.

"Huh!" says I. "Todd."

He moans out something or other, and goes through some shivery motions.

"Well, well," I goes on. "Last I heard of you, you was enjoyin' yourself fine, throwin' a scare into an elevator-load of women, with Mrs. Rosenbaum due on the scene any minute. Did she show up?"

"Ye-e-es," groans Todd.

"And you called her an old hen and a few other things like you threatened?" I asks. "What then?"

"I—I got the chuck," says Todd.

"Didn't look for any medal of honor to be pinned on you, did you?" I goes on. "But that ain't the only job in the world, is it? Is that what ails you—or have you been home?"

He nods and lets out some more groans.

"Oh, you have?" says I. "And there was a

big howl, I'll bet. But I expect you told that domestic trio of yours where they got off, eh? How did that work out?"

Todd squirms around quite a lot, but finally he gets out his report.

"They—they nearly did me up," he says.

"What!" says I. "Three women?"

"You—you never saw that sister of mine," whines Todd. "She's as strong as any man. It wasn't so much that she hurt as—as——"

Here he breaks off, snifflin'.

"Ah, come," says I. "Let's have it. What was it she did to you?"

"Spu-spanked me," sobs out Todd, hidin' his head.

"W-h-a-at!" I gasped. "You let her spa—— Good night! Here, Pinckney. Here's your mystery. This noble gent here on the floor is Mr. Samson Todd. Up to this noon he was elevator-man next door. He didn't like the job. Too many females—old hens is his favorite name for 'em. And he's been beefin' about his women-folks at home. I tried to tell him that if he was a reg'lar guy he wouldn't come grouchin' to me about his troubles, but would stand up and feed it to 'em. Well, it seems he did. And now look at him. He goes and lets 'em—— Say, shall I have Swifty Joe sweep him out, or——"

Pinckney has hung his crook-necked walkin'-

stick on his left wrist and is holdin' up his other hand.

"Tut, tut, Shorty," says he. "Charity, old chap. There may be extenuating circumstances. Who knows? Perhaps the gentleman will sit up and join me in a cigarette."

"Eh?" says Todd, eyein' him suspicious.

Pinckney is offerin' his gold cigarette-case. It's a minute or so, though, before Todd can be induced to hoist himself into a chair and light up.

"Pardon me for asking so personal a question," says Pinckney, "but you haven't always been an elevator-man, have you?"

"Not me," says Todd. "Six years, that's all. And it was six years too many."

"There, Shorty!" says Pinckney triumphant. "You see! Mr. Todd is, as I suspected, a person of defeated ambitions; one who has felt the bludgeonings of fate, but whose head is as yet unbowed. Am I right, Mr. Todd?"

Todd was gawpin' at him puzzled; but after thinkin' it over he nods solemn.

"And what," Pinckney goes on, "were some of those unsatisfied ambitions, Mr. Todd?"

"You—you mean——" begins Todd.

"The things you yearned to do and could not," Pinckney helps out.

"I—I allus meant to take lessons on th' accordion," says Todd. "I can play it some—

part of 'Annie Laurie' and the chorus to 'Good Old Summer-time.' I was learnin' 'Tipperary' too, gettin' along fine, when that old hen sister of mine found the thing and bust it up on me."

"On you!" says Pinckney. "Ah, figuratively, I trust? But none the less there burst a rosy bubble. No more could your fettered soul rise on the wings of Orpheus. Still, there were other aspirations, no doubt?"

"Uh-huh," says Todd, gazin' dreamy.

"Such as——" suggests Pinckney, lettin' his left eye twinkle my way.

"I should ha' been a sea captain," says Todd, "sailin' round and seein' the world; maybe smugglin' a bit, or mixin' in with pirates over in them Molly Islands."

Pinckney draws in a deep breath. It was his turn to stare. He'd dug up something he hadn't expected.

"Oh, I say!" says he. "That's a whale of an ambition. But what kept you from being a sea captain, Todd?"

"Ah, I never had no chanst," says Todd. "I been a stick-in-th'-mud. Sick a lot, for one thing. And then I never knew just how to get started. But I allus wanted to strike out for myself, to get away where there was danger and fightin' and things to stir your blood. If I could only get there now, right in the thick of

things, I'll risk but I'd take my share. I'd show 'em that Samson Todd was a man yet!"

He's straightened up, Todd has, and his squinty eyes has an odd greenish flicker in 'em, and he's waggin' his head cocky. I can't say whether he's funny or pathetic—a little of both, maybe. As for Pinckney, I can tell he's havin' the time of his life.

"Todd," says he, "I am almost inclined to believe you. As our friend McCabe would phrase it, you tell it well. And yet—ah, I must quote for you my favorite motto: Adventures, Todd, are for the venturous."

"Hey?" says Todd.

"For cherries," says Pinckney, "one climbs a tree. Never were there more stirring times than these. The world at war—and you running an elevator!"

"Oh!" says Todd. "I couldn't get into anything. I'm over forty."

"Still," says Pinckney, "for one who so earnestly craves that sort of thing there should be some way open—perhaps not in the very trenches, but—— See here; what were you before you became an elevator-man?"

"Little of everything," says Todd. "I used to sell extras durin' the Spanish-American muss. Later on I peddled bananas and potatoes and such truck from a cart. Then for a while

I helped in a quick-lunch joint. That's where I got to be a cook."

"Really?" says Pinckney. "You are a cook?"

"Nothin' fancy," says Todd. "I can hash up common things, though. Must have had half a dozen places, but on one account or another I got——"

"See here, Todd," breaks in Pinckney. "I have the very thing for you. Heard of it only this noon when I was talking to a friend—a naval officer. Said he was desperate for cooks, must find twenty of 'em right away—mess cooks for the transport service. Just cooking for the crews, you know. There you are. That's you. I know where he is now. Wait; I'll call him up."

"But—but say——" begins Todd, openin' and shuttin' his mouth gaspy and stretchin' his fingers out after Pinckney, who's started for the 'phone.

"Well?" demands Pinckney.

"Did—did you say them cooks was for transports?" goes on Todd. "Steamers that carry over soldiers and supplies, ain't they, and—and get sunk by submarines?"

"Yes," says Pinckney. "Precisely what you want, isn't it? High adventure. It's the chance you've been waiting for. Shall I call him up?"

It was fascinatin' to watch Todd's face. First off, that weak chin of his was sagged, his eyes were popped, and his skin had turned a dull gray. Sweat was startin' out on the sides of his nose. Then, all of a sudden, the muscles in the mouth corners stiffen, and up comes his head.

"Yes," says Todd, hoarse and husky. "Call him."

Now, how you goin' to tell? Might have been easy enough for some of us, makin' a move like that. But it must have been different with Todd, who'd just been driftin' along, like rubbish on the tide, ever since he was born. I expect he'd wanted to do things, in a vague sort of way. He'd wished and waited. And that would have been as far as he'd gone if he hadn't been picked up by the scruff of the neck, as you might say, and chucked into this.

Things moved fast for Todd from then on, though. Inside of half an hour he'd been hustled in a taxi to a recruitin' office and had signed up. Before dark he was on a dock somewhere in Hoboken, loaded down with more clean warm clothes than he'd ever owned before, not to mention such trifles as new razors, fancy toilet soap, a couple of pounds of his favorite smokin' tobacco, and other little contributions that Pinckney and I could collect in a hurry.

"There," says Pinckney, as we waves good-by to Todd—"there embarks a potential hero."

"I don't know the brand," says I, "barrin' it's one that makes good until he meets a spankin' sister."

"That menace, at least," says Pinckney, "he will be free from on the high seas. As for the rest—well, let us wish him the best of luck and consider the incident closed. Thank you, Shorty, for a diverting interlude."

That's Pinckney, all over. Two minutes from then he was taxin' his mighty intellect with the proposition of whether he should go home for dinner or stop off at the club.

I must say I couldn't forget Todd quite so easy. Maybe I thought of him a couple of times durin' the next week, when I noticed the West Indian runnin' the elevator next door. Then the affair faded out. In a month, if I'd heard the name, about all it would have called up would have been something humorous about somebody gettin' spanked.

Then here yesterday in breezes Pinckney, and instead of indulgin' in any of his usual piffle he pulls a chair up to the desk where I'm sittin' at ease with my feet up, and proceeds to talk serious and confidential.

"Shorty," says he, "I've just had a talk with my naval friend in the transport service."

"Y-e-e-es?" says I.

"Well," he goes on, "the U-boats got the *Arapiqua* on her return trip."

"*Ara*—which?" says I.

"Don't you remember?" says he. "The one Todd shipped on as cook."

"What?" says I. "Sunk her? And how about Todd?"

"I'm coming to that," says Pinckney. "The *Arapiqua* went over loaded with mules and provisions. She arrived safely, in spite of a lively brush that the convoys had off the coast of France. Coming back the fleet ran into quite a storm. The *Arapiqua* became separated from the rest—strained a propeller-shaft. She was lying to, patching things up, when the submarine appeared. Of course she put up a fight, but a chance shot disabled the after gun, killing or wounding nearly all of the gun crew. There was nothing left but to take to the boats. And when they had rowed off, the sea still rather rough, the Huns went aboard and planted a few bombs. You know they don't waste torpedoes on mule transports. And when they had done their usual pilfering they went back to their boat and watched for the *Arapiqua,* abandoned and rolling helpless in the waves, to go to the bottom.

"Then the unexpected happened. They saw something stirring under the canvas cover of the forward gun. A man had crawled out and was cutting away the cover lashings. He was trying to swing the gun around to bear on them.

That was enough for the Huns. Down they tumbled as fast as they could follow one another below. But before the U-boat could submerge the lone man on the *Arapiqua* had got the gun going. The first shot missed by a hundred yards, so the transport captain says—he was watching through his glasses. The second wasn't quite so wide. And the third was a fair hit, just at the base of the periscope. A fourth shot struck well forward. There was a tremendous explosion. The stern of the submarine was flung up and she sank like a rock.

"The man on the *Arapiqua* was still firing, shot after shot, as fast as he could feed them in, when the bombs began to go off. One exploded amidships, another in the stern, and the third sent the whole forward deck high in the air. The lone man and his gun went with it—to kingdom come. But he'd done his work. Shorty, can you guess who the fellow was?"

"You—you don't mean," says I, "it was—Todd?"

Pinckney nods.

"Samson Todd, hero," says he. "The transport captain recognized him through his glasses. Besides, he was the only man unaccounted for, and, so far as known, the only one on board, besides the gun crew, who could load and fire the three-pounder. He had begged so persist-

ently to be shown how that the men had humored him. It seems he thought he might be made a gun captain on the next trip."

"But how did he come to be hidin' there under the canvas?" I asks.

"Couldn't we pass over that?" says Pinckney. "Suppose he did begin the fight badly—he ended it nobly enough. Not Ulysses himself could have won to a more glorious end."

"That's right," says I. "It was a man's finish. Huh! Todd! Who'd have thought it was in him?"

VII

SULLY AT A SKIP STOP

"SHORTY," says Sadie here the other night, "I hope you remember that day after to-morrow will be the nineteenth?"

"No," says I, "I can't remember that far ahead.

"But you know what I mean," says Sadie.

"Maybe I can guess," says I. "You're predictin' it will be Saturday, too."

"And I suppose that's all it is to you?" says she, sighin'.

"Wrong again," says I. "See!" And I produces a little white box from my pocket and passes it over.

"Oh!" says she, openin' it. "A wrist watch! The very thing I'd been thinking of for him. I'm sure he will be pleased with that."

"He ought to," says I. "Illuminated face, gun metal guard and genuine pig-skin strap, just like the regular doughboys wear. And if he don't use it in football scrimmages it may last him a month."

"I suppose Sully is rather young to be given a wrist watch," hedges Sadie.

"He ain't so young as he was," says I. "He'll be ten Saturday."

"Just think, Shorty! Ten years old—Sully!" And Sadie stares into the fireplace.

"That's what's bound to happen to youngsters, if they're lucky," says I.

"I know," says she, "and we——"

"Ah, cheer up, old girl," says I. "We ain't quite in the antique class yet. Several skip stops before we get to forty. Let's forget that and stick to this big event of Sully's. Goin' to celebrate for him in some way, I expect?"

Sadie admits that she's planned a little party.

"That's the stuff!" says I. "All the kids in the neighborhood, I expect? That is, all but the Honorable Peggy. Too bad she can't be in on it, too. His first girl, at that."

"Yes," says Sadie, "I'm afraid he won't think it much of a party without Peggy. I don't see, though, just what I can do."

I didn't, either. For who were we to break in where the Purdy-Pells and the Boomer-Days was shut out? You see, we'd acquired some mighty swell neighbors durin' the past six or eight months. Oh my, yes! The ones who leased the Knight place. And we'd always thought the De Forest Knights was top notchers, in their way; owned Mexican gold mines, sported two men in livery on the limousine, had been operated on by the Mayo brothers—all that sort of

thing. Their four acres of shore frontage was next above my little strip of sea wall, you know.

But a couple of years ago, when something happened to shut off the dividends from the gold mines, the De Forest Knights took a sudden slump. Kind of tough luck, too, for they always nodded pleasant enough as they passed, and once or twice De Forest gave me a lift up from the station. All of a sudden, though, they did a fadeaway. Just disappeared. I heard how they was livin' in one side of a two-fam'ly house in Philadelphia. And for months there was a big "For Sale or Rent" sign up on the fancy iron gates.

Then came the Redingtons. For a spell there was quite a mystery about this tall, spruce party with the grayish mustache who walked with a limp in his left leg. Some thought he was an English plute who'd come over here to dodge usin' a meat and bread card. But in a little place like Rockhurst-on-the-Sound things get around. It finally comes out that he's Sir Hartley Redington, who's been sent over on some important government job—shipping, most likely, or army supplies. That's as far as we got.

For Sir Hartley is a poor mixer. He could come nearer walkin' right over you without seein' you than anyone I'd ever just missed meetin' before. Nothing folksy about Sir Hart-

ley. Not even a mornin' nod as he saw me comin' out of my gates, no more'n a hundred feet from his. Course, I didn't chew my nails or grind my teeth over a little thing like that. 'Specially after I heard how Commodore Dick Woods had been stung when he hailed Sir Hartley jovial on the station platform one mornin' and suggested that he'd like to put up his name for the Yacht Club.

"Beg pardon," says Sir Hartley, givin' him the cold eye, "but I don't care to join any club, sir."

"Oh, well," as I suggests to the Commodore, "maybe we can worry along without his royal sirness."

But Mrs. Boomer-Day got the hardest bump of all. Course, she'd rushed right over and left cards shortly after the movin' vans had unloaded, and then she proceeds to organize what she calls a garden party, even havin' a white throne-effect built where Sir Hartley and Lady Redington could have the neighbors presented to 'em. And I understand she and Mrs. Purdy-Pell almost went to the mat over who should and who shouldn't be invited. But when the big day came the Redingtons took no more notice of it than as if their engraved card had been an auction hand-bill tossed on the front porch. They didn't come and they sent no word.

From this and other hints folks got the idea

that the Redingtons wanted to be left alone. Someone discovered that the black band Sir Hartley wore on his left sleeve was for two younger brothers that had been lost at Ypres, so the knockers gradually let up. But nobody was left with nerve enough to breeze through the Redington gates again, not even to sell tickets for Red Cross benefits. And with all the social climbers we got out here you can imagine how hard that must have been on some of 'em.

That's what gave Sadie such a gaspin' spell when she discovers how thick little Sully is gettin' with little Miss Redington. You know there's a bathing beach on the Knight place and while our old neighbors owned it Sully used to make himself as much at home there as if it was his own back yard. Him and the Knight youngster had a spring board rigged up and a float anchored off, and what them two kids didn't learn about swimmin' and divin' wasn't worth knowin'. 'Specially Sully. Why, he was doin' the Australian crawl before he was eight and the way he could sport around in the water would make a porpoise look like an amateur.

He was some disgusted boy, too, when he finds that the only young person our new neighbors has in the family is a girl. But that don't last long. After he's seen her do one dive from the float he gets into his bathing suit, jumps off the sea wall and swims right over to join in the

fun. I understand the governess in charge tried to drive him home, but the young miss wouldn't stand for it. Later on we got his report on the young lady.

"Say, pop," he confides to me one day, "she's a reg'lar person, that girl next door. Y'otta see her do a back-flop. An' I'm showin' her the barrel-roll an' a lot of stunts."

"What's the young lady's name?" says I.

"Ah, she ain't no young lady," says Sully. "Only a couple months older'n me. She's just Peggy. Know what that old prune face governess calls her, though? The Hon'rable Marjorie! I heard her tell the chauffeur that 'the Hon'rable Marjorie wasn't through with her bawth.' Wouldn't that crust you? Like she was a congressman or sump'n. Where do you expect she gets that stuff?"

"It's by me, Sully," says I. "I ain't mixed much with the nobility myself."

"Gee!" says Sully, "there ain't anything stuck up about Peggy, take it from me. Course, she does pull a funny line of talk; sayin' how she feels top-hole, and tellin' me I needn't swank around or carry so much side about my swimmin'. Stuff like that. And she laughs at things I say, too. Think of that! But she's right there when it comes to playin' games. 'Most as good as Bob Knight was."

I didn't want to tell Sully so, but I was lookin'

for him to come home one of these days with his mouth down, after an interview with Sir Hartley or Lady Redington. Nothing like that happened, though. Either they left such matters to the governess to settle, or else they didn't want the youngster to be as lonesome as they were. Besides, the Honorable Peggy looked like she could put up quite an argument for herself, in case it was needed.

She's a slim, graceful young party, with black hair and black eyes, and as well tanned as an old boot. Mostly she wore a one-piece bathin' suit and when it wasn't that she romped around in khaki knickers. And with that box cut on her hair you could hardly tell whether she was a boy or a girl. If Sully could show her how to bat up flies with a baseball, she could give him points on cricket and lawn bowlin', and when it came to handlin' a tennis racket I judge that Sully was a poor second.

Anyway, they put in a lively summer, and that governess must have earned her pay follow'n' 'em round. It suited Sadie all right because Sully wasn't all the time gettin' mixed up in scraps and mischief with the village boys. I expect she was kind of tickled, too, at the way Sully had crashed in with the aristocracy.

"I believe he's getting quite fond of the Honorable Peggy," she remarks once.

"Ain't you beginnin' kind of early to work up a romance for the youngster?" I asks.

"How absurd, Shorty!" says she. "It is only that I am glad he's finding out that girls aren't quite such despisable creatures as he used to think they were. You know, he has been rather——"

"I know," says I. "He's all boy, Sully; maybe a little rough and noisy, but not such a poor specimen at that, eh?"

Which gets a fond smile out of Sadie. "I am sure that neither of us overlooks any of his good points," says she, "but it's hardly the best taste for us to mention them."

I agree to that. Still, maybe I can sort of throw off casual and modest that if there's any ten-year-old in Rockhurst or the adjoinin' suburbs that has got Sully beat we'd like to see him. Course, maybe some would object to the curl in his reddish-brown hair, or the freckles, or point out that his nose was a bit snubbed. But I notice that when he springs that cherub smile of his and lets 'em have the full effect of them Killarney blue eyes—well, you should hear some of the women rave. Them's his company manners. Outside of that I'll admit he's a young tarrier.

They made a great team, him and the Honorable Peggy. She's an inch or so taller maybe, but Sully is stockier built, and from the very

start they seemed to get along well together. It's the first summer for two or three years that Sully ain't showed up home about every so often with scratches on his face or a lump under one eye. Also it's the first vacation when I ain't had to apologize to some fond mamma for the rough way he's used her little pet. About all the notice he'd ever taken of girls before was in thinkin' up ingenious ways of tormentin' 'em—pullin' out their hair ribbons, chasin' 'em with dead snakes, and so on.

Whether he tried any of them tactics on Peggy or not we couldn't tell, for they did all their playin' over on her grounds, except when they'd jog down to town in the pony cart, after sodas and candy. If he did put over any rough stuff I expect he got back as good as he sent. All through July and August he was there about every day. Sometimes he'd stay for tea and drift home about five-thirty with his face smeared with jam and no appetite for dinner.

"Whaddye know?" he announces once. "They don't eat dinner until after eight and Peggy has to go to bed at half-past seven. Ain't that fierce?"

"It's quite English," says Sadie. "I think you ought to do that, too."

"Aw gee! Have a heart!" says Sully. "Nine's bad enough."

Even after school opens and the football

season begins Sully still finds time to see more or less of Peggy, and when he don't get over she comes to the hedge and whistles for him. I notice he's generally ready to drop things and go, too.

So it does seem kind of tough that she can't be in on his birthday party. I was expectin' him to put up a howl about it, but when we're goin' over the names all the suggestions he has to make is about a few of his football bunch that he wants invited.

"Don't forget Plug Connors and Joe Sarello and Mutt Marsuvian," he puts in.

Sadie glances at me hopeless. "Is—is it necessary to include them?" she asks.

"You know this ain't exactly a convention of Allies we're arrangin' for," I suggests.

"Ah, they'd be sore if they didn't get asked," says Sully. "Might not let me be quarterback any more."

"Oh, very well," says I. "So long as we don't have to have any Serbs or Greeks or Polackers. We don't want to give Master Percey Boomer-Day and the others too hard a jolt."

"Ah, say!" protests Sully. "Have we gotta have Sissy Day and all them mollycoddles?"

Sadie insists that we have, so the debate ends fifty-fifty, in a compromise. But never a word said about the Honorable Peggy.

When I comes home Friday night though I notice that Sadie has her chin in the air and is smilin' sort of triumphant.

"You can't guess what I've done, Shorty," says she.

"Buffaloed the grocer into lettin' you have some extra sugar?" says I.

She shakes her head. "I've been over and called on Lady Redington," says she.

"The nerve of you!" says I. "Did they sic the dog on you, or what?"

"She was very nice," says Sadie. "She is going to let the Honorable Peggy come to the party. Perhaps she'll drop in herself for a little while. And I left an invitation for Sir Hartley, too."

"Hal-lup!" says I. "Why not cable for King George?"

"Of course," adds Sadie, "I've no idea Sir Hartley will accept, but I thought I might as well ask him. Mr. and Mrs. Purdy-Pell will be here, you know, and the Boomer-Days; and even if neither of the Redingtons appear, I think it's nice of her to let the little girl come. I'm not going to tell Sully. We'll surprise him with her."

"He'll be tickled, all right," says I.

Well, the affair started the way kid parties generally do, with a few of the early comers sittin' around gigglin'; boys on one side, girls

on the other, and nobody able to get 'em together. Then Sully gets his eyes on the Irish-Italian-Armenian football squad, who have been hangin' around outside bashful for half an hour. He lets loose a yell and rushes out to tow 'em in. And of course they starts rough housin' in the front hall until Sadie marches 'em in where the girls are and they quiet down like they'd been put under arrest.

Accordin' to Sadie's program there was to be dancin' first, so I feeds a one-step into the music machine and tells 'em to go to it. Which Master Percey and a few of the other nice little boys does prompt. Not Sully though. He can dance as well as any of 'em, and usually does; but now he sits between Mutt Marsuvian and Joe Sarello, entertainin' 'em with sarcastic remarks.

"Why, Sully!" says Sadie. "Can't you find a little partner?"

"Nah!" says Sully. "I ain't gonna dance."

About then there's a stir at the front door and in comes some fresh arrivals. I took one look and nearly does a duck behind the music box. For here's Sir Hartley, all dolled up in striped pants, gray spats and a black frock coat, with a splash of colored ribbon pinned across the front—war decorations, I judge. Behind him is Lady Redington, costumed simple in white

and black, and leadin' by the hand the Honorable Peggy.

Say, I thought for a minute there that Mrs. Boomer-Day was goin' to throw a cat-fit, but she comes out of it beamin' and almost parts a corset lacin' when she's presented. I might have had a lot of fun followin' her motions if I hadn't got a glimpse of Sully. He has his toes turned in and his head hung down, but his eyes are rolled up so that he can get a good view of Peggy, and he's starin' for all he's worth.

You could hardly blame him, for it's some change that has come over the Honorable Peggy. Maybe it's because we'd always seen her in riding togs or knockabout costumes. And there ain't anything elaborate about what she's got on now, only she looks so much more dainty and girlish than I'd imagine she could.

"What a little beauty!" I hears Mrs. Purdy-Pell gasp admiring.

In the meantime I was hearin' a little of this pretty speech Lady Redington was gettin' off to Sadie about "her adorable little son who has been such a charming, manly playfellow for dear Marjorie."

Then she turns to Peggy and remarks: "Now, dearie, run and dance with the others."

Peggy seems willin' enough. She stands there lookin' sweet and smilin', waitin' for some

of the boys to ask her. But they didn't seem to dare. Even Master Percey Boomer-Day don't quite have the nerve. So she's left standin' alone at one side. Most youngsters would have flushed up, or sidled pouty into a corner. But nothing like that from the Honorable Peggy. She spots Sully over at the far end of the room and makes straight for him.

"Please, Sully," says she, haltin' in front of the mixed quartette, "can't we have a dance?"

And there it was, up to Sully. Here on either side was his rough-neck friends, who had the say as to who played quarterback and who didn't, and who rated kids that danced with girls in about the same class as the ones who took piano lessons or collected stamps. They was snickerin', too. And then again there was Peggy, her sparklin' black eyes watchin' him expectant and her slim, graceful figure swayin' to the music.

"Ah, why not?" says Sully, gettin' up.

And knowin' something about just what that decision meant to Sully I decides it's a little the nerviest play I'd ever seen him make. Off they go, swingin' and turnin' in perfect time, like it was something they'd practiced together for months. The three in the corner stops snickerin' and watches with their mouths open.

"Chee!" I hears young Sarello remark, "they're some swell steppers, ain't they?"

He wasn't the only one that was takin' notice of this particular couple, either. I see Lady Redington watchin' 'em approvin'. Even Sir Hartley gives 'em a smile as they float past. I was gettin' a bit chesty myself over the way Sully was showin' up as a parlor performer when the piece stops sudden. Master Percey and his friends does the usual polite stunt of applaudin' enthusiastic for an encore. But it looks like Sully had used up his entire stock of good behavior, for he drops Peggy in the middle of the floor and comes sidlin' back sheepish to his bunch.

"Hey, Sully," demands Plug Connors, "who's yer goil?"

"Aw, shut up!" says Sully.

"Wotcher quittin' for?" asks Mutt. "You was doin' fine."

"Huh!" says Sully. "Ditch the kiddin' or I'll hand you one. Come on fellers, let's get the ball and go through some signal work. Eh?"

I didn't know whether to interfere or not, so I lets 'em slip out into the hall. In a minute or two they was at it. Meanwhile, the Honorable Peggy has tossed her head independent and drifted out by the door. I'd sort of followed along in case I should be needed to save any of the furniture from bein' wrecked so I was on hand when the thing happened.

Peggy had been watchin' these fake rushes

they was makin' for two or three minutes. You could tell she was gettin' kind of interested by the way she got up on her toes and held her fingers gripped, but I didn't look for her to butt in. First thing I know though, she jumps out as the ball is snapped back to Sully and calls to him:

"Here, Sully! To me, now!"

There's an answerin' twinkle in Sully's eyes and he makes a neat pass over the heads of his squad. Peggy catches the ball fair, balances a second on her toes, and then sings out defiant:

"Catch me if you can," and is off like a whippet after a rat.

They don't need any urgin', that collection of young hicks. No girl was goin' to get the best of them at their own game. With a chorus of howls they follows. In through the livin'-room, where the dance is still going on, they dashes, spillin' one couple complete and shovin' others against the wall.

And then the Honorable Peggy gives as fine an exhibition of shifty footwork as you seldom see. She ducks and dodges, first this way and then that, shakes off the tackles and gets clear with a ripply little laugh. And it's only when Plug Connors organizes the interference by gettin' his crowd spread out fan-shaped that they got her cornered. Even at that she makes a dashin' try to break through. I ain't sure but

she'd made it too, only Master Boomer-Day, in his panicky attempt not to get mixed up in the affair, has to stumble right in her way. That's how it was he goes to the bottom of the heap when Mutt and Plug executes their flyin' jump that ended Peggy's forty-yard dash around the end.

Course, by then some of the ladies were squealin' excited and we had to put the ban on football practice. Master Percey had nearly lost his nice white collar and most of his wind by the time he could be fished out, but the Honorable Peggy scrambles to her feet hardly mussed at all.

"Well, you got me," she admits, springin' that laugh of hers.

"If it had been on a field though," says Plug Connors, "you'd made a touch down, sure. Some girl!"

I was wonderin' whether the Redingtons was gapin' for breath or sufferin' from shock, but I finds them lookin' on kind of amused, as if they was used to that sort of thing from Peggy.

It was a wise move of Sadie's to spring the ice cream and cake just about then. It quieted things down a lot, and I noticed that Sully didn't need any promptin' as to who he ought to take into the dinin'-room with him. He grabs Peggy by the hand and tells her to "get in on the eats." There was more dancin' afterwards,

and always in the middle of it you'd see Sully and Peggy. I didn't hear him apologizin' again to the football squad for it, either.

It wasn't until the affair is all over and everyone had gone home though, that we gets a true slant on this buddin' romance. Sadie brings it out by sayin' how Lady Redington tells her they're leavin' the States for good next week and are goin' back to England.

"Isn't that too bad, Sully?" she asks.

"Huh!" says Sully. "I knew."

"But you'll miss Peggy, won't you?" she insists.

"Nah!" says Sully careless.

"Why, Sully!" protests Sadie.

"I guess you don't know what a lot that girl cost me this summer," says Sully. "Always takin' a fifteen-cent plate of ice cream instead of a cone. Gee! Besides, if the fellers think you gotta girl they'll kid you to death. I'm glad she's goin'." And Sully walks off lookin' bored.

"The little wretch!" gasps Sadie.

"All boy," says I. "And I expect the international alliance stuff is called off; eh, Sadie?"

"Perhaps," says she, "yet who knows?" And she goes on starin' dreamy into the fireplace.

Ain't that the female of it, though?

VIII

A SLANT AT THE COMERS

I'd just finished a half-hour session with the Honorable Thaddeus Corson, durin' which I was supposed to be tellin' him what was the best kind of exercises to take for a Wall Street liver and a Union League digestion. Anyway, that was what I was bein' paid for.

As a matter of fact, I hadn't been tellin' the Honorable Thaddeus much of anything. He'd been tellin' me. Oh, yes; I'd been favored with a full account of his case, from the way his tongue looked in the mornin', to that heavy feelin' he had after dinner.

Surprisin' what a lot of these old plutes are that way. They've made good at something or other,—jugglin' suburban and country trolley properties was Corson's specialty,—and because they've broken into the seven-figure class they hand themselves the pleasin' fiction that they're wise in the head on any subject that comes up.

As for me, I kids him along and don't disturb his happy dreams. I was willin' to admit that he did know the trolley game fairly well. Must

have, to keep on buckin' the big syndicates and not get squeezed out. Short lines was his feature; independents, small-town stuff. He was fond of tellin' how he got hold of his first controllin' interest—by swappin' a mortgage on a run-down gas plant for five miles of wabbly track, half a dozen punk cars and a twenty-year franchise. Now he owned 'em all over the lot—up in New England, down in Jersey, and as far west as Iowa.

You'd never guess it, to look at him, either. Kind of a simple-lookin', leather-faced old Rube. And in that dusty black Stetson, the slate-gray frock-coat and the striped trousers, you'd probably have sized him up for some village banker or Cayuga County senator. He had served a couple of terms in the Assembly from an up-State district, hence the Honorable.

He'd been comin' to the Physical Culture Studio, on and off, for a couple of years, mostly durin' the winter, when he missed gettin' out and showin' his gardeners how to trim hedges and plant trees. So I'd heard a good deal, first hand, about how much he knew. Maybe that's why I turns him over to Swifty Joe so prompt, strolls out into the front office, and shuts the door behind me.

I finds someone waitin': a tall, loose built young gent, wearin' thick eye-glasses. Quite a spiffy dressed party he is, with his fawn-

colored gaiters and his yellow gloves, and he's leanin' jaunty on a crook-handled walkin'-stick, gazin' out one of the front windows.

"Ah!" says he, swingin' round. "Professor McCabe?"

"No other," says I.

"I suppose, then," says he, "that father is about through in there?" And he nods towards the gym.

"Eh?" says I. "Sure you got the right shop? I haven't seen anybody round here that I'd guess you'd call father."

"I think you have," he goes on. "Thaddeus Corson, for instance. I'm Thad Corson, Jr."

"One on me," says I. "You must take more after your mother than after the old man."

"I suppose I do," says he, "in more ways than one. It is a favorite topic of father's." And he shrugs his shoulders. "I merely stepped in," goes on Thad, "because I missed finding father at the office. Thought I'd pick him up on the way home."

"You're just in time," says I. "He'll be out in a couple of minutes."

And, while he's consumin' a cigarette and gazin' out on to Forty-second Street, I couldn't help checkin' him up with Thaddeus, Sr. What a difference there is, sometimes. Now, here's this young sport with his long, pale face, full eyes, his narrow stooped shoulders and his easy

drawin'-room manners. Why, he's about as much like his old man as a spray of lilies-of-the-valley is like a sunflower.

The minute his father steps into the front office and sees him, he lets out a snort.

"Huh!" says he. "So you're back, eh?"

"Yes, sir," says young Thad. "I—I'll tell you about it after we get home."

"Oh, let's have it," says Corson. "Come on! Out with it!"

"But, Dad!" protests Thaddeus, Jr., glancin' at me. "Couldn't we save this until after dinner?"

Another snort from Corson.

"Bah!" says he. "McCabe won't mind. And I'm curious to know just how badly you've fallen down this trip."

The youngster hunches his shoulders.

"I couldn't do a thing out there, Dad," says he.

"You mean you didn't," says the other. "But why—why? That's what I want to know. What's your alibi?"

"They're against us, that's all," says young Thad. "They don't intend to renew our franchise on anything like the same terms. They mean to raise our taxes, make us pay a percentage on gross receipts, and perhaps let in a competitive line."

"Oh, they mean all that, do they!" says Thad-

deus, Sr., his smolderin' little eyes flarin' up combative. "How about what I told you to do with the city council?"

"No use," says young Thad. "Reform administration—two Socialists among the lot. You know that newspaper you took the advertising away from for printing a story about the grade-crossing smash last fall? Well, they've been pounding you ever since, stirring up public sentiment against the company. And next year matters will be worse. They're going to make you an issue in the coming city election. I went over the whole situation with our local attorneys. They admitted that things looked squally. And, as I failed to see how I could do anything along the lines you suggested—well, I came back."

The Honorable Thaddeus stares at him hostile. Then he turns to me.

"Talk about young blood being needed in business!" says he. "This is a sample. He goes out and lets a sore-head newspaper and a few cheap politicians throw a scare into him; quits—cold!"

"Oh, well," says I, soothin', "they got to learn, I expect."

"If Thad only would learn!" raps out the old man, pacin' up and down. "Why, look here: I'll bet I could go out there to-morrow, get a line on that bunch of ward heelers, and inside of

a week have enough of 'em fixed so I'd be making the city council jump through a hoop."

Young Thad don't say a word. He just shakes his head.

"Eh?" demands Corson. "Think I couldn't?"

"I think you would be indicted before you could get out of the county."

"Bah!" says the other. "Maybe you've got some brilliant scheme of your own?"

"Oh, what's the use, Dad?" says he. "They wouldn't seem good to you."

"How'd you guess it?" sneers Corson.

"Simply because you never have conceded that I could possibly know anything on any subject whatever," comes back young Thad.

He don't say it messy—just states it quiet and patient.

But Corson blows out his cheeks and glares like he'd been mortally insulted.

"So that's how you feel about it, eh?" he rants. "Want to give McCabe here the notion that you've got an old tyrant for a father, do you? That's your gratitude for all I've tried to do for you! What do you think of that, Professor?"

But I'd had about enough of the old grouch myself.

"Ah, give the boy a chance," says I. "He might have a hunch; who knows?"

"Very well," says Corson. "Let him tell us why he shouldn't have followed my orders. Think I don't know the street-car business, eh?"

"I am quite sure you did know it—once," says young Thad. "But this 'fixing' game is slightly out of date, Dad. It doesn't work as it used to."

"Oh, doesn't it?" gasps the old man, gettin' purple in the gills. "Then what would? Let's hear what you'd do instead. Or would you make a present of the line to the city and tell 'em to run it as a public charity?"

"If you wish," says young Thad, "I will give you the facts in this particular instance. As you know, the company hasn't paid a dividend in the last three years. The rolling stock is in bad shape—cars dirty and shabby, half of them with flat wheels, and all of them rickety. Then, there's the power plant, with a set of patched-up engines that are coal-eaters and energy-wasters."

"Huh!" grumbles Corson, actin' sort of jarred. "I suppose you would give that one-horse town a metropolitan outfit?"

"Not precisely that," says Thad.

"Well, well! Just what would you do?"

"In what capacity?" asks Thaddeus, Jr. "As office-boy, for instance?"

"No; as general manager," raps out Corson.

"Do—do you mean it?" says the other.

"Why not?" says Corson. "If I'm an old fossil, I ought to know it; and if I'm not, perhaps it will be worth what it costs to prove it to my son. Yes, I'll make you the G.M. I'll give you a year, full swing. But I must know something of your program, of course."

"Certainly," says young Thad, producin' a notebook. "You see, I had jotted down a few things, just for my own satisfaction. First, I would instal a new Corliss, so that we could keep our schedules. Then I'd paint and repair the cars, one at a time, perhaps adding three or four new ones of the pay-as-you-enter type. At the same time, I would start a publicity campaign—big ads. in both papers, assuring our patrons that we were there to give them service, first, last, and all the time. There's a young reporter on the *Herald* out there, a chap who was a classmate of mine, who can write that sort of thing with either hand. Yes, I know that is the paper which has been roasting us. But we'd forget that. So would they, after our ad. contract was signed. And I should hope, within a month or so, to have public sentiment with us instead of against us; then I wouldn't care about the city council. It's an entirely different policy, I know; but——"

"Yes, yes," breaks in Corson. "It's the fad just now—soothing syrup stuff. Make 'em be-

lieve you're running your business to suit them instead of yourself."

Young Thad indulges in a quiet smile.

"I suppose you wanted to try out new methods when you first started?"

"Me?" says the old man. "Why, I began with a cable line, and in six months I'd changed it to an overhead trolley—first in the State. Some of the directors thought I was crazy. But I'd studied it all out; I knew what I was doing. You, though! Why, you've been out of college barely two years."

"Just look who's been coaching me all that time though, Dad," puts in Thad.

"There, now! None of your blarney," says Corson, slappin' the youngster playful on the shoulder. "But you shall have a shot at it, son—a year's try-out. And if you can show the old man any new tricks—well, we'll see."

And off they goes, arm in arm—which was a happier finish than I'd looked for when they starts in.

Bein' as how I'd taken part in the original debate, old Corson sort of counted me in on the deal.

"Wasn't it you urged me to give the boy a show?" he demands, next time he came to the Studio. "Well, I've done it. He's in full charge out there now, with two hundred thou-

sand to finance his schemes. I'll bet he sinks every dollar."

"What's the stock quoted at now?" says I.

"Around 68," says he.

"Just as a flier," says I, "I'll go long on a hundred shares of your holdings at that figure."

"You will?" says he, gawpin' at me. "By George, I'll take you, McCabe!" And I handed over a margin check on the spot.

Must have been about a month later when he comes in chucklin'.

"You would back young blood!" says he. "Noticed where your trolley stock has slumped to?"

I said I hadn't.

"Fifty-six," says he. "Had to pass another semi-annual. And there's a minority committee applyin' for an injunction."

"That don't mean much to me," says I, "but I'll stay with it. I'll cover. Ain't got his schemes to runnin' yet, eh?"

"Oh, he's pulling the soothing syrup act, all right," says Corson. "Spending three hundred a week on newspaper space. It's smooth talk, too. You'd think he was not only undertaking to carry his passengers home, but to put 'em to bed and shake the furnace mornings. He's buffaloed the city council so soon. They'll renew the charter most likely, and he's worked 'em for two new turnouts. I understand he's main-

taining a ten-minute schedule to three miles beyond the city limits for a single fare. That may be good philanthropy, but it isn't good business."

Next I heard from Corson, he calls up to cancel his afternoon session, and he talks puffy and excited.

"I've got to go out and see what that boy's up to," says he.

"Been plungin', has he?" I asks.

"That hardly describes it," says Corson. "Say, what do you think? He's planning to lay four more miles of track and has ordered ten new cars. In these times! Why, he'll bankrupt me, at this rate. Know what rails cost now? And grading and ties? Suffering Lazarus! That's what I get for turning a boy loose."

He shows up a week later, wearin' a grin.

"Well," says I, "did you block him off?"

"No," says he, "I didn't. Instead of that, I've come back to float a bond issue for him. Know what Thad's done? He's plannin' to give the city a new amusement park. Yes, sir. He's organized his company, got options on a hundred acres of land, and has started extending his line. Seems he found a real pretty little lake out there, and a pine grove where people have been in the habit of driving out for picnics. Well, he's gobbled up the whole thing, and by

the Fourth of July he'll have a regular little Coney Island in full blast. Halfway out he's got more options, and is promoting a nice little suburb with a golf and country club on the side. See? Making business for the line. And instead of running half empty cars he'll have 'em crowded most of the time. Why, I'll bet that Sundays and holidays he'll have to carry ten thousand people. That's going to mean revenue."

"And maybe dividends?" I suggests.

"Bound to come," says Corson. Then he stops and scratches his head. "And to think of Thad—just a boy, as you might say—working out schemes like that which I—— Well, I'll have to own up, I wouldn't have thought of 'em in a thousand years. And this is my game, too, the one I've made my pile at. Oh, Thad stumbled into luck, that's all. In the long run, it's us old fellows who can be depended on."

"Sometimes," says I. "But mostly I'm backin' the comers."

"You'll lose out, then," says Corson.

"Think so?" says I. "By the way, how are those shares standing the strain?"

"Oh!" says he. "Of course, with all that new business in sight, they're on the jump. I look for 'em to touch par inside of six months. In fact, McCabe, I'll give you a thousand to close our little deal, right now."

"Listens good to me," says I. "I'll soak it into some real certificates of that company young Thad's runnin'."

And as we breaks away we was both grinnin'.

When I got home that night, I starts to tell Sadie about what I'd pinched off; but she cuts in with a report about little Sully. Seems he was demandin' a pair of hockey skates.

"I don't think he ought to have them," says she. "Hockey is such a rough game. I wish you would talk him out of the notion, Shorty."

"Sure I will," says I.

I went about it real vigorous, too, pointin' out that we knew what was good for him a heap better'n he did.

"Aw, Pop!" he protests. "Jes' 'cause you didn't uster play hockey yourself! A lot you and ma know about it. Shucks!"

"Now, listen here, young man," I starts in, "when I tell you a thing once, I want you to——"

Then I stops; for, someway, just about then I thought of old Corson.

"Well?" asks Sadie, after the session is over.

"Eh?" says I, tryin' to look innocent.

"What about the hockey skates?" she demands.

"Skates?" says I. "Oh, yes! I promised to get him a pair in town to-morrow."

IX

A FEW SHIFTS BY HOMER

Nor that I'm out to scrap any traditions. Nothing like that. As a rule it don't get you anywhere. Besides, when you get used to expectin' certain kinds of parties to act so and so it's disturbin' to have some outsider crash in and point out where this or that Mr. Whosit is runnin' exactly reverse to form.

It was that sort of smart Aleck stuff this Barney Shaw tried to get away with a while back. You remember. And look where it landed him. One of his plays wouldn't run a month on Broadway now. Then jumpin' to another line: These war stories. We want to feel sure right from the start that the noble young gent who has all the earmarks of a slacker, and gets the cruel shunt from his best girl on that account, is really a daredevil Secret Service man who will round up a whole gang of desperate spies along towards the end. Same way with the poor fish from the gents' furnishing department who seems to have a backbone like a piece of boiled spaghetti and the brain consistency of a two-minute egg; yet when he gets

to the front turns out to be such a bad actor in a charge that they have to rope him to an ex-gunman to keep him from rushin' beyond the barrage.

No, traditions like that are glorious and sacred. We've been all of three or four years buildin' 'em up and who am I to horn in and try to kick the underpinnin' away, even in a playful mood. So when I start slippin' you a few facts about Homer Cass I feel like I ought to begin by statin' that this is just a personal and private record which don't need to be counted in on the general dope. And anyway, Homer's ain't what you might call a closed career. He's still in the game, Homer is. That being the case, you never can tell.

Course, some would judge Homer offhand, and stick to it, like Swifty Joe. I remember just how he did it, although it must have been more'n a year ago. I was in the gym, having put in a stiff forenoon's work on three or four of my reg'lars, mostly overweight brokers who'd gone jumpy in the nerves handlin' a wild cat market. I was scrubbin' up for lunch too, and was part way buttoned into my street togs when Swifty glides in easy and closes the door behind him gentle.

That's what makes me stop sudden and look up surprised. For as a rule Swifty's motions are more impetuous. Not that he ain't an A1

physical culture assistant. He is. Barrin' the cauliflower ear and a few facial blemishes which you get used to after you know him, Mr. Gallagher is a credit to his profession. He may have a few freckles on his neck and I don't deny his habit of conversin' out of only one side of his mouth at a time, but when I want a first vice-president well lathered up, or some heavy podded general manager needs to be shown how short of wind he is, I turn 'em over to Swifty.

When it comes to announcin' guests in the front office I expect a young lady secretary or a church usher might do it different. As a general thing Swifty's play is to stick his head in the door and sing out throaty: "Hey, Shorty! Guy to see yuh." Maybe it's the head of some trust comp'ny that's discovered he has gouty joints, or perhaps it's a paper towel agent with figures on how to beat the laundry. No fine discriminations for Swifty. They all get the same from him unless it's a case where he's 'specially impressed, such as by a three-chinned party in a mink lined overcoat; or again when it's someone whose face doesn't happen to please him. And I could guess by the way he held his nose that this was a time when he hadn't fallen in love at first sight.

"Say, Professor," he growls from the port side, "they's a poor prune out there callin' for yuh."

"Is, eh?" says I, tuckin' the ends of my bow tie under a fresh collar. "What makes you think he's that?"

"Ahr-chee!" Swiftly volleys from starboard. "Don't his map slope both ways from his squirrel teeth and ain't he pimpled under the eyes?"

"Then it can't be Mr. McAdoo, or General Pershing, either," says I. "Is he young or old, tall or squatty built?"

"He looks old for twenty-one," says Swifty, "and if his green suit hadn't faded some he'd pass as a human string bean."

"You're some vivid describer, Swifty," says I. "I don't see how it can be anybody but Homer Cass."

"Come to think of it," says Swifty, "he did call himself Mr. Cass. Mister, mind you! And says how it's important."

"Sure," says I. "If it's anything Homer wants, it is important. Bound to be—to him."

So I don't rush out excited before I has my coat half on. Maybe I took a little more time than usual. As a matter of fact I'd rather have ducked meetin' Homer than not. I'd had that pleasure before, if you'd call it a pleasure. As for me, I could work up lots of before-luncheon pastimes that would suit me better; and I'm no game inventor, at that.

Oh, yes, Homer wasn't half the stranger I could wish he was. I'd had him on my hands

more or less for quite some time now. You know how specimens like that get wished onto you. Seems his old man had been in my trainin' camp way back when I pulled down the lightweight championship that night in Denver. And I don't suppose there was one of the gang that didn't confide to me sooner or later, how it was really him who was responsible for my puttin' it over.

Yet, as I remember, Long Jim Cass had the hard job of handlin' the press bunch and keepin' the boys from gettin' too good a line on my condition, so my manager could place the side money at fair odds. He'd been some kind of advance agent before that, travelin' in front of Tom shows and burlesque outfits, and so far as I could see his strong suit was sittin' behind a tub of suds and discoursin' eloquent on what he might have been if he'd had a chance.

When he shows up here at the Studio a couple of years back though, and tows in this stringy son of his, I has to fall for the auld lang syne stuff. Jim announces that he's still in the show game, but it turns out he's runnin' an elevator in a theatre buildin'. About what you'd expect of a man who'd load up his boy with a name like Homer. And Mrs. Jim Cass, I understand, had been a second row favorite who'd been lost in the shuffle, leavin' the youngster for Jim to bring up accordin' to his own

notions. Which he'd done. At the age of ten Homer had toured around the Middle West as mascot of a bush league ball team. Later on he'd been an attendant in a Toledo shooting gallery, starter at a Coney Island merry-go-round, bell-hop captain in an Atlantic City hotel, and had filled other responsible positions requirin' talent and industry.

Just then he was at liberty and Jim was willin', on account of our being such old chums, that I should place him in something soft with one of my rich friends. Well, mainly to get rid of him, I did find him a job as chalk boy in an uptown broker's branch. At the end of a fortnight he reports that he's had to resign because the assistant manager was sore at his gettin' so popular with the customers. True, what they told me about Homer was slightly different. "Sulky and lazy," was their verdict, but after another visit from Jim I worked Homer into Purdy-Pell's offices as street runner. He lasted there nearly a month, chiefly on account of his showin' up so seldom that it was hard to fire him.

And that's the way it had gone. Every time he got kicked out of a place I'd tell him I was all through—and the next I knew I'd be beggin' someone to take him on in a new line. Until finally I lands him behind the soda counter in this Seventh Avenue drug store.

"I dunno's I'm goin' to like it," objects Homer after the first day.

"Sure you are, Homer," says I. "I don't see why I didn't think of it before, because a syrup squirter is just what you were born to be."

"Huh!" says Homer. "Where do you get that stuff?"

"Listen, Homer," says I, backin' him against the wall, "it was revealed to me in a dream. I could see you, all dolled up in a white coat, standin' graceful behind the marble slab and dealin' out mixed sundaes to rows of lovely lady typists. No going back of a dream like that, you know. And anyway, this is where I get off. This is the last chance for you, ab-so-lute-ly. So you'd better stick."

And somehow or other he does. Not that he makes any hit with his boss, who gets purple in the face every time he looks at Homer and when he meets me always demands peevish what it was I had against him. But counter help was gettin' scarce along about then and he took out his grouch in threatenin' to give Homer the chuck about every other day. Neither did Homer get fond of his job.

"I dunno why I keep on with the old sore-head," he whines to me. "Say, for doin' the slave driver act he could make Simon Legree look like a glad hand mission worker. And this

standin' all day is awful hard on the feet. But the worst is the fool women who drift up with a fifteen cent check and begin mumblin', 'Oh, dear, I don't know what I want. Lemme see; verniller, I guess.' And when I start dishin' up an ice cream soda they squeal, 'No, no, a plate, and maybe I'll have strawb'ry sauce—no choc'-let, stupid.' 'Wotcher think I am, a mind reader?' I asks 'em. Say, they get me so I could chew glass, some of them Lizzies do. And lots of them Percy boys are just as bad. Believe me, I tell 'em so, too.''

''What a nice pleasant time you must have day by day, Homer,'' I remarks.

''Yes, and I'm goin' to jump the whole shootin' match some of these fine mornin's,'' threatens Homer. ''You'll see.''

But he didn't. He keeps on jerkin' the silver levers and gettin' sulkier and sourer every week. It's a wonder that face of his didn't curdle the whipped cream. It's a narrow gauge, two-by-four face, with a little rabbit mouth and two projectin' front teeth showin' prominent in the middle. Also he has the pimple decoration that Swifty spoke of. Somehow it has always seemed to me that if I was runnin' a soda counter I wouldn't want clerks that had—— But then, that's one enterprise I ain't ever likely to have a hand in. Unloadin' Homer on one is probably as near as I'll ever get.

So now maybe you've got a faint idea why I don't rush madly out to ask Homer what he wants this time. And when I do get to the front office I find him pacin' up and down nervous with a cigarette danglin' from his lower lip as usual.

"Well, at last, eh?" says I. "Been promoted to the sidewalk, have you?"

Homer scowls in his pleasant way. "Nah," says he. "I'm gettin' my reg'lar thirty minutes off. I come around to see what you think of this new draft business."

"Why," says I, "you got by last time. Teeth, wasn't it?"

Homer nods. "But they've put me in class A again," says he. "No dependents, y'understand. Know what I got a mind to do?"

"Enlist with the Treat 'em Rough corps?" I asks hopeful.

"Not if I got good sense left," says Homer. "No, sir! How do you think I'd stand if I was to get married?"

"Wouldn't let you out, Homer," says I. "Not this time. You might get a different grade by it."

"And before they got to me the war might be over, eh?" says he. "Looks like that was my best bet, don't it? Anyway, that's what I'm gonna do, get hitched up."

"Homer," says I, gazin' at him curious, "you

don't mean to say you could find a girl fooler, that is, a girl who'd suit you?"

"Plenty," says Homer, waggin' his head. "Noticed the little queen on the soap and perfume counter at our place?"

"What," says I, "the one with the thin-spaced black eyes and the solid set to her jaw?"

"That's Edith," says he. "She don't get on well at home and—and we been goin' around some together. Course she's some snappy in her ways, but she don't mean nothin' by it. We'd make a go of it, I guess."

"Think you could finance a flat on twelve a week, Homer?" I suggests.

"Oh, Edith would keep on at the store," says Homer. "We wouldn't say anything about it there. How much do these preachers stick you for a parlor performance, eh? Well, guess we could manage it by next week."

And next thing I heard they had. But Homer gives the poorest imitation of a smilin' bridegroom you ever saw. He says they're gettin' along all right. That was after the first ten days or so. But before the month is out I meets him on the street and he spills this tale of woe in my ear:

"Whaddye know about a woman that clamps down on your pay envelope and feeds you a quarter at a time?" he demands. "That's hoggin' it some ain't it? 'Who elected you to tote

the fam'ly wad?' I asks her. But what's the use startin' an argument with one of that kind? She comes right back messy tellin' me where I get off and it lasts an hour by the watch. Huh! Same way about everything. Who do you guess has to roll out at 7 A.M. and start the breakfast? Me! And wipe the dinner dishes, too. She even decides whether we go to the movies or not. Generally it's not. Say, I used to be bossed around only about fourteen hours a day. Now it's a continuous performance, with the night shift gettin' worse and worse."

"Listens to me, Homer," says I, "like a pair of dispositions going to the mat for a draw."

He shakes his head gloomy. "Knockout more likely," says he, "with me takin' the count. That is, if I don't decide to quit."

"Oh, you two will shake down in a few weeks more," says I soothin'. "It's often that way at the start."

"You don't know Edith at all," says Homer. "And you're in luck, at that."

Course, after he's gone I couldn't help havin' a quiet little chuckle, for it ain't often you really know of a slacker's gettin' so near what's comin' to him. I felt like someone ought to go pin a medal on Edith. As for Homer's threat to bolt, I didn't take any stock in that at all. His kind seldom do. They lack the nerve.

But as time went on and I saw nothing more of him I got sort of curious. So one day I drops around at the drug store. And there's no Homer in sight behind the soda counter. But the little lady with the narrow set black eyes is still dispensin' toilet articles. Driftin' over casual I invests in a tube of shavin' cream.

"Mrs. Cass, ain't it?" I asks.

"Well, what if it is?" she snaps.

"Excuse me, ma'am," says I, "but I was wonderin' where Homer was these days."

"Were you?" says she. "That's more'n I can say."

"Then he—he's quit?" I suggests.

"You guessed it," says she. "It's a case of congratulations being in order."

No, she don't know where he's gone, and don't care. All she hopes is that he never comes back. She ain't a bit interested in the mystery of what might have happened to him. I'll admit I was though, in a mild sort of way.

And when I gets this note scribbled on a red triangle letter head and dated from an army cantonment over on Long Island I has to pass on the news to Swifty at once.

"Remember your friend with the squirrel teeth—Homer Cass?" says I. "Well, what do you think he's gone and done now?"

"Bit somebody in the leg and been sentenced to wear a muzzle?" asks Swifty.

"Not at all," says I. "He's joined up. He's a soldier now, Homer is."

"Him!" gasps Swifty. "He'll make a hot Hun killer, he will. Why, he's too yellow to chew a marshmallow for fear of swallowin' the pit!"

"Just the same," I goes on, "he's in the artillery. I'm due out at his camp Thursday, to start some new boxin' squads, so I'll have a chance of seein' Homer in uniform. It ought to be worth while. You know he got him a wife to keep out of the army, and now he's enlisted to get clear of the wife."

Swifty grins. "That's what I call some shifty guy," says he.

I thought so too, for a while. And while I'm at the camp I keeps an eye peeled for this artful dodger. But of the hundreds of men that I put through exercises that day there's nobody with anything like Homer's classic features. You know what mobs there are at such places though. I was meanin' to look him up after I got through but one of the captains insists on my goin' over to the Officers' Club with him.

It's quite a classy joint for a camp—big, sunny parlors, lots of easy chair, nice rugs on the floor. Then there's a billiard room, a hand ball court with shower baths, and off in one wing a reg'lar café where they serve a first class meal. The captain was all for orderin' up the

whole program for me, from oysters to chicken à la King, but I had to beg off.

"Thanks just as much," says I, "but a glass of buttermilk for mine, if you've got it."

"Why, certainly," says he. "Any kind of drink you can name. We've just installed a new soda fountain, you know. Found an expert mixer. Let's step in and I'll show you."

And clear across the room I thought I could see something familiar about the hang of that white jacket on them narrow shoulders. Uh-huh! Homer. He didn't see me, first off. He was busy waitin' on a couple of lieutenants who was showin' the new addition to the café to some of their young lady friends. And they was having the same difficulty decidin' what to take as if they'd been up against a reg'lar soda bar.

"Say, Madge, what you going to have?" asks one. "What's an armistice sundae, anyhow? Would you risk it, or stick to marshmallow float? Yes, I guess I will."

I notice too, that Homer don't make any impatient moves or snap out any crisp comments about not being a mind reader. Nothing like that. He's about the tamest soda jerker you could ask to see operate. After they're all through debatin' and chattin' he asks polite for the third time what it will be.

"Accommodatin' young gent, ain't he?" says I to the captain. "Where'd you get him?"

"Why, from the kitchen police squad," says the captain. "He held the record there for being the worst dish-washer, the most consistent shirker and grouchiest grumbler of the lot. His top sergeant reported that he wasn't any good at other things, wanted him sent to the guard house for a week. So I had him brought in. 'What were you doing before you joined?' I asked him. ' 'Tending a soda counter,' says he. 'Good!' says I. 'That's what you'll do here. Permanent detail.' Bit of luck for us, eh? And I've just learned that the fellow has a wife somewhere and has been holding out her allotment. He didn't seem quite pleased when I called him in a little while ago and made him sign off her share. But I rather think he understands now that it goes until he's mustered out. Ah! Our turn now. Buttermilk, did you say?"

And you should have seen the look on Homer's face as he finds me lined up across the counter from him. With his captain standin' by though he don't even bat an eye. If my friend hadn't been called away just as we'd finished our drinks I wouldn't have had a chance to get Homer's views on his new job at all. As it is we're left all alone for several minutes.

"Funny how things work out, ain't it, Homer?" says I.

"I don't get you," says he.

"Why," says I, "you got sore on soda clerkin', you didn't want to be a soldier, and you tried to duck bein' a married man. Now you're all three, ain't you?" And I couldn't help windin' up with a grin.

"Say," says Homer, glancin' around cautious to see if it was safe, "if you can see anything funny in that you ought to go tell Edith. Maybe one of you would laugh yourself to death over it."

And the last I saw of Homer he was scowlin' at himself in the glass.

"But then," as I remarks to Swifty Joe later on, "he may outlast his jinx. A few years from now he's liable to be classed as one of the heroes of the great war, along with the boys who turned the trick at that Château Thierry place, and most likely drawin' down a pension. Then it'll be Homer's turn to grin."

X

WHEN BUDDY BOY CAME BACK

I EXPECT I was tellin' you about the Kinneys a while back. Uh-huh! The two brothers that live down on the marshes and had the feud that was wound up in France when Scott Kinney's boy went out reckless and dragged back Cousin Tubby, who'd been plugged in two places.

Course, it didn't take any sharpshootin' to hit Tubby, he being built so wide. But to snake him back from a machine gun outpost and into a first aid dugout under fire—well, I should have wanted nothing less than a truck, and a mighty speedy one, at that. No wonder they hung a medal on Corporal Buck Kinney and put his name in the papers. Also I leave it to you if doin's like that wasn't enough to put a crimp in the best little fam'ly row ever worked up.

But that's all old stuff now. Let's go. You remember this war business, and havin' his boy made a corporal, spruced Scott Kinney up quite a bit. Instead of slouchin' around in wadin' boots, doin' a little fishin' and clammin' when he felt like it and loafin' around Costello's road house the rest of the time, Scott proceeds to get

a shipyard job, cuts down the booze, and gives a fair imitation of an industrious citizen.

I thought it was going to last, too. It seems though that having a hero in the fam'ly was just one too many for Scott. I believe he staggered along under the honor for nearly two weeks, and then one Saturday night he makes a wild leap from the water wagon, joins his old gang at Costello's and irrigates his parched anatomy gay and careless. Well, you could hardly expect anyone with Scott's record to make a sudden shift like that without havin' his foot slip now and then. He stuck at the work fairly reg'lar, only knockin' off now and then to celebrate some important event, such as the taking of St. Quentin or the fall of Jerusalem.

As he explains to me one Monday morning when I meets him navigatin' wabbly down the Post Road and roasts him for droppin' back into his old ways: "Tha's zawri', Shorty, but you—you ain't the father of Fightin' Buck Kinney. I am." And he straightens up dignified to pound himself on the chest.

"Admittin' all that," says I, "I can't see where you add to the fam'ly honor by gettin' lickered above the ears."

"Gar-r-r-r!" says Scott, wavin' an imaginary flag. "Ain't we got th' Bushes on th' run?"

"You've got yourself on the toboggan," says I. "Course, I don't blame you for being proud

of Bucky. But how proud do you think he'll be of you when he comes home?"

That seems to penetrate through the fog, for Scott stops wavin' and scratches his grizzled hair. "Tha's so," he admits. "Sumpin' in that."

"You bet there is," says I. "So why act like you thought you'd swallowed Hindenburg and could drown him in front of Costello's bar?"

As a rule such advice don't do much good, but in this case I handed myself a decision that maybe it had. Anyway, I didn't hear of Scott Kinney celebratin' any more victories so ostentatious and I had reports that he was workin' reg'lar. Why shouldn't he, at six per a day? Why, he didn't average that much a week in the old days. Didn't even seem to know how to get rid of it until I got after him on the thrift stamp and liberty bond proposition. So he must have salted down quite a bit.

When the war came to a finish there so sudden though, and they begun layin' off men in the shipyard, Scott was one of the first to quit. There were plenty of other jobs he might have had, at fairly good money. Three different times I tried to place him. But there was nothing doing.

"What's the use now?" he demands. "It's all over, ain't it? We've busted that autocracy business, plumb wrecked it. Me and Bucky. I

guess I helped some. Now I'm goin' to lay off."

"You'd be a lot better off if you didn't," says I. "Besides, with these high prices, your savings won't last long. What's the idea, anyway?"

"I'm kind of waitin' around for Buck to come home," says he.

"That may be months," says I. "You'll be goin' hungry first thing you know."

"Oh, I guess not," says Scott. "The Gov'nment wouldn't stand for that. Uncle Sam ain't goin' to let the father of a hero like Buck Kinney want for food. Look what I've done for my country. I've give a son who's shed his blood on the field of honor. He's got a medal to prove it. Now it's up to th' country to take care of us."

"That's a grand little program of yours—if it works out," says I.

He's a pig-headed old pirate too. And then, a life of leisure came natural for him.. It's in the Kinney blood, I expect. He did go back to his flounder fishin' an' clammin' by spells, but mostly he puts in the time loafin' around the village, joinin' in loud on all the things he and his Bucky had done to Germany and Turkey and how to settle things in Russia. They were a mighty blood-thirsty lot, them bench warmers, but none of 'em had anything on Scott when it came to suggestin' ingenious and unpleasant

ways of making the Kaiser and Crown Prince-as-was wish they hadn't started anything. Slicin' their ears off and havin' 'em walk barefoot on barbed wire from Boston to Chicago was his favorite plan.

Also he was fond of holdin' forth on the subject of how Buck had won his medal. So far as I could judge the full details of that hero stunt had never come through. You know, I was the one that got the official report from the war department, and while that had given the main facts in the case, it left a lot to be filled in. And Bucky himself hadn't supplied much. He never was what you might call a gossipy letter writer. But as the weeks went on and Scott Kinney told the story over and over to admirin' audiences, it got to be quite a yarn. The last time I listened in on it he had Bucky dashin' for more'n a mile, right through a heavy barrage, jumpin' into a machine gun nest, killin' off half a regiment of Huns single handed, and then stoppin' to thumb his nose at a Hun general before he tossed Cousin Tubby over one shoulder, a field piece over the other, and ambled back where Pershing was wavin' his hat delighted.

"Yes, sir!" he finishes up. "That's the kind of boys we raise in our fam'ly. We're the fightin' Kinneys, we are."

In spite of the fact that this trait hadn't been

much in evidence before, the crowd let Scott get away with the statement. For one thing, Rockhurst-on-the-Sound was almost as chesty over Buck's little exploit as Scott was himself, and when we put up that temporary Roll of Honor opposite the First National Bank we had a red star painted after Corporal Kinney's name, with a footnote in three inch letters explainin' how he'd been awarded the Distinguished Service Medal.

You see, while we'd sent a whole raft of our boys into the big scrap, including sons of some of our biggest plutes, and most of 'em had got to the front, the only one to pull down anything like a war medal had been Buck Kinney. They couldn't show anything like that at Orienta, just above us; nor at Apawamis, just below. So you could hardly blame us for not overlookin' the fact. I expect there wasn't a speech made durin' the loan and war fund drives but what had some mention of "the noble son of Rockhurst whose fearless gallantry on the field of action has been so signally honored by the nation."

We were willin' to forget that the noble Bucky had begun his heroic career all unsuspected by the general public. I expect those of us who knew him by sight a year or so ago couldn't see much in him beyond a lanky, slouchy youth with a slack mouth and shifty

eyes. Mostly he hung around the Bon Ton Pool Parlors, a cigarette danglin' limp from one side of his mouth and his back propped against something solid. I'd heard he was quite a shark at Kelley and that at straight pool he could spot anyone in town five balls. So far as I know, though, nobody ever accused him of indulgin' in any form of industry.

But then, what could you look for with the bringin' up he'd had? And he sure had turned out to be an A1 soldier. Cases like his must have been common, for everyone knows what army trainin' has done for lots of boys. Maybe he was coming out all right, after all.

"What do you think Bucky'll go in for when he gets back?" I asks Scott one day.

"Politics," says Scott. "They're goin' to run the country, them boys."

"I shouldn't wonder," says I. "What I meant, though, was what kind of work he'd tackle."

"Work!" says Scott. "Say, ain't he done enough? He'll need a good, long rest, he will. We both will. Besides, he'll be busy paradin', and makin' speeches and so on."

"But that won't bring him anything he can trade in at the grocer's, nor you either," I suggests.

"Aw, I guess the Gov'nment's goin' to look out for us," says Scott.

He not only sticks to this comfortin' belief but he proceeds to practice it faithful. I tried my best to get him to put in a few days helpin' my man Dominick rebuild the seawall, but all he'd do was promise to think it over, and three different times he failed to show up. He took to dressin' sloppier than ever and about once a week was as often as he troubled to shave these days.

And then the transports begun landin'. You know. New York cut loose with her first Welcome Home doin's. I yelled myself hoarse there one day when that first bunch of returned heroes marched up Fifth Avenue, not mistrustin' that among 'em was Corporal Buck Kinney. But he was. Soon as I heard of it next mornin' I tells Sadie and we jumps into the roadster and drives down on the marshes to the little shack where Rockhurst's only Distinguished Service man had been returned to the bosom of his family.

I must say, too, that Bucky looked the part. He's a soldier, every inch of him—tall and straight and sunburned, with his shoulders squared, his lips tightened up and his eyes steady. Yes, he says he's mighty glad to get back. France might be all right to pull off a war in, but as a place to live—well, give him the U.S.A., every time.

He gets a little fussed when Sadie and I try

to tell him how proud we are of him and all that. And our attempt to pump out of him the details of that medal winnin' stunt was almost a total failure.

"Oh, that was just for luggin' Tubby in," says he. "It was my job, anyway. We was in lots worse messes later on. I didn't know they was goin' to wish any medal on me. Tubby would have done the same for me."

Then Scott makes him get out his barracks bag and exhibit his relics—the Prussian guard helmet, the shoulder straps cut off the Hun captain he fished out of a dugout, and the collection of belt buckles and so on. Bucky grins at some of our fool questions.

Mostly, though, he seems kind of dazed and uneasy. I catches him glancin' stealthy at the old folks now and then, as if they looked sort of strange to him and he was tryin' to get acquainted all over again. And while Scott had put on a celluloid collar in honor of the occasion, he was hardly a parent that could be gazed on with pride. Nor Mrs. Scott Kinney, either. She had on a faded old wrapper that should have gone in the wash tub week before last, a greasy gray sweater with the sleeves partly ravelled out, and her hair was mopped around her head any old way.

You'd have to be blessed with some vivid imagination, too, to call the inside of this messy

shack home sweet home. The dishes from last night's supper and this mornin's breakfast was still cluttered around on the table, the top of the stove and in the sink. I wouldn't like to guess how long since a broom had been used on the floor. And outside there was the same kind of housekeepin' in evidence—ashes and garbage dumped where it had come handiest to throw them; an old coat of Scott's trampled in the mud; broken oars, bottles, boxes and other junk scattered about the yard and on the rickety wharf at the edge of the creek. Course, this was nothin' new. The Kinneys always had lived that way. But somehow Corporal Buck seemed to be gazin' around as if it was kind of strange to him. Or maybe it reminded him of some of the places where he'd been quartered. I couldn't tell.

"Well, you boys certainly did the job up right over there," says I, as we starts to leave, "and when you feel like tacklin' steady work with a pay envelope coming in reg'lar every Saturday, remember we got a committee that stands ready to make the connection for you."

"Much obliged," breaks in Scott, "but I guess Bucky ain't goin' to start answerin' any seven o'clock whistle yet a while. Not him."

And for a spell there it looked like Scott was right. As soon as a few more of our boys begun driftin' back, some from demobilizin' camps

and some from convalescent hospitals, we had a little Victory parade of our own and a peace meeting in Odd Fellows' hall. Corporal Kinney was prominent at both affairs. They even got him to make a speech. Wasn't such a bad speech, at that. He didn't pull any of the spread-eagle stuff such as some of our fire-eatin' stay-at-home patriots fed us. His talk was modest and sober for the most part, although that tale of his about how he tried to coach a squad of Frenchies through a baseball game was good enough to go in a book.

But two or three weeks went by and Buck didn't apply for the job in the Nut & Bolt works that we had waitin' for him. I saw him around town only once or twice, so I concludes he's still restin' up. And Scott ain't in evidence, either. Finally, one Saturday afternoon, I takes another run down to the marsh.

Well, the first thing I sees is Scott Kinney, up on a little knoll about a hundred yards from the shack, diggin' away with a spade so busy that he don't notice me until I'm almost over him. He has his coat off and his sleeves rolled up and he's leakin' generous, although it's a chilly afternoon.

"Look like you was minin', Scott," says I.

"Huh!" says he, stoppin' to mop his face. "Might as well be. The top of this ground is froze hard enough."

"But what's the scheme?" I goes on.

"Better ask Buck," says he. "It's his fool idea. Buildin' a hothouse, he says, though why he can't wait till spring is by me. Him? Oh, he's up near Portchester, workin' in a place where they raise cucumbers and lettuce and such truck under glass. He'll be home soon and then we'll both pitch in and work until dark. Bound to get this up by the end of the month, but I don't see how it can be done."

I gathers that Buck plans on startin' in the hothouse business for himself early in the spring and has sort of drafted the old man in as high private.

"One of the ideas he brought back from France," says Scott. "And say, he's got a lot of 'em."

"I take it," says I, "that there's more or less labor connected with most of 'em."

"Is there!" snorts Scott. "Say, I ain't been worked so hard in all my born days as I have since that boy came back. This is only a sample. You ain't seen the house, have you? Well, jest come up and take a look."

Honest, I hardly knew the place. First off a little yard had been fenced off all around, and inside of that the ground had been cleaned up and leveled and raked until it looked as neat as a city park. Paths had been laid out and bushes and shrubs planted. The shack itself had been

whitewashed so it fairly glistened. So had the fence, and even the wharf. New panes of glass had been set in the windows and all of 'em scrubbed. The chimney had been topped out and out and back of it was a new shed with a run of chicken wire leadin' down to the creek.

"What's that for, Scott?" I asks.

"Geese," says he. "Buck's started to raise 'em. Another of his French notions. Goin' to have pigs and a cow later on, too. You know what that means—gittin' up at daylight to milk and mixin' bran mash twice a day. He's got his maw at it, too. Take a look inside if you don't believe it."

It's a fact. The floor was as clean as the windows, the stove had been polished up like new, and a freshly ironed tablecloth had just been spread. Also Mrs. Kinney was spruced up more'n I'd ever seen her before. With her hair washed and done up careful and in that pink and white checked dress she looks like a different party. More cheerful, too. She comes in from out back hummin' a song and 'most blushes when I remarks on the change.

"Bucky's ideas," says she. "He's—he's awful particular about things since he come back from France."

Then she shows me the geraniums growin' in the window box and where Buck has planned to put up a big fireplace with an outside chimney.

"But I don't believe I'll ever learn to cook all them French messes he wants," says she. "Think of tryin' to make soup out of a few onions and some grated cheese; or from a scrap of meat and a carrot and a few green weeds he picks up beside the road! It seems jest plumb foolish to me, but of course I keep at it. Bucky knows best, I expect."

That seems to be Scott's verdict, too, although he ain't enthusiastic about it.

"Course, I don't mind his branchin' out this way," says Scott, "and doin' things like he's seen 'em done over there, but I wisht it didn't take so much dad-blistered work to put 'em through. Them Frenchies must be a mighty restless lot. Must be catchin', too. Bucky was never like this before he went to war."

"Then he ain't satisfied to wait for Uncle Sam to take care of him, eh?" I suggests.

"Bucky?" says Scott. "He ain't satisfied to wait for nothin'. Routs me out at 4.30 these cold mornin's and has me eatin' what he calls chow by lamplight! Then, before he goes off he'll lay out enough work for a whole gang of ditch diggers. Gets that from havin' been a Corporal so long, I expect, and havin' bossed a squad of husky young soldiers. I ain't used to it. Gets me in the joints and the back. No use tryin' to argue with Buck, though. Why, he says some of them French women would do

twice as much in a day. I don't see any let up to it, either, for when he gets all them pesky farm animals to take care of, and the hothouse goin', it'll keep all of us on the jump."

"Won't leave you much time to spend at Costello's bar, I expect?" says I.

Scott sighs regretful. "I'm off the hard stuff for keeps," says he. "Bucky won't have it. All he lets me have is a little of that van rooge, mixed half and half with water, twice a day. Van rooge! Ever tried it? Got just about as much kick to it as so much circus lemonade. But that's all I'm drinkin' these days—and at meals, too!"

"In other words," says I, "you still have cause to cuss the Kaiser?"

"I have," says Scott, "and between you and me, when Buck ain't around, I hand them Frenchies a few. They may be our noble Allies and all that, and I'm willin' they should build monuments to us, and name streets after Wilson; but I wisht when Bucky'd saved Paris he'd let it ride at that and not hung around collectin' so many of them back-breakin' French habits."

On the way home I has to chuckle more'n once, and when Sadie wants to know what I'm grinnin' about at dinner I remarks offhand:

"Why, I was only wonderin' how many soldiers' families are being reconstructed as thorough as the Kinneys are gettin' it."

XI

A FOLLOW-UP ON SNIPE

Not that I want to hand myself any more'n I deserve, but now and then I do come across with the happy hunch. Such as this idea of mine about placin' one of our returned heroes. Uh-huh. The minute I hears Swifty Joe Gallagher tellin' about this soldier cousin of his I thinks of Mrs. Boomer-Day. Course, I don't hold that nobody else would have had the same thought; some would, and then again some wouldn't.

You see, she'd been over to our house only the evenin' before, gushin' away as usual about this and that. And as a rule I'm apt to do a quiet sneak whenever Mrs. Boomer-Day shows up, unless I'm backed into a corner and have to stick it out, in which case I open both ears and try to let her chatter breeze through without cloggin' the works.

But this time she happens to strike a line that got me listenin' in spite of myself. She's tellin' Mrs. McCabe how interested she is in this wonderful reconstruction work that's being done for our dear gallant soldier boys who have come

home from France all shot to pieces and otherwise disabled.

Seems she'd taken a three weeks' art course herself and was all equipped to teach one-armed heroes how to paint blue butterflies on pink cream jugs, so they might support themselves and their families and be self-respecting and independent, and all that sort of thing. Somehow, though, the Reconstruction Committee had taken no notice of her offer to give up two afternoons a week to this noble work, and she felt just too terrible for anything about it.

"Yes, after all that preparation, you must," says Sadie, rollin' her eyes at me.

"And so," goes on Mrs. Boomer-Day, wavin' her gold lorgnette and shruggin' her wide shoulders, "I have decided to do something in a personal way; on my own, as it were."

"Yes?" says Sadie, encouragin'.

"I mean to take one right into my home," announces Mrs. Boomer-Day. "Of course, not in a way to make him feel that he is an object of charity. I shall make a place for him; find some useful employment about the estate, and then go ahead with the reconstruction work during his spare time. I could use one as an extra chauffeur, for instance; that is, providing I could find just the right person. Would it not be thrilling now, to take one of those poor

maimed heroes of Cantigny or Château Thierry and put him on his feet again?''

Sadie admits that it would, and they drifts off into discussin' other important subjects, such as what to do when one's darling little chow insists on nippin' the butler playful, and whether summer furs will be worn as much next season as last. So I remembers a date I didn't have at the Country Club and makes my get-away.

Must have been only the next mornin', and at the Physical Culture Studio, that I hears Swifty Joe grouchin' away to himself. And him being the most talented and high-priced Studio assistant in the profession, I naturally asks what's gone wrong.

''Ahr-r-r chee!'' remarks Swifty, usin' the south side of his mouth. ''It's easier tellin' what goes right these times.''

''Yes, but nobody does,'' says I; ''so let's have the chief complaint. Have they raised your rent again, or is it that your favorite conductorette has been fired?''

''Nah,'' says Swifty. ''I got a three-year lease, and I don't play no fav'rites with them B. R. T. lizzies. It's the raw deal muh cousin Snipe gets after they've shipped him back from France in a cattle boat that makes me good an' sore.''

''Oh, yes,'' says I; ''that soldier cousin of

yours, eh—the one who was gassed and shell-shocked? I thought they fixed him up at a base hospital? Got some extra pay, too, didn't he?"

"Suppose he did?" says Swifty. "A guy can't live the rest of his life on $60, can he? Yet, when he shows up at the brass bed works and asks for his old place on the truck, there's nothin' doin'. A foreman by the name of Engelmeyer gives him the laugh. That's what he gets for bein' a Hun chaser. He comes back to have a home-grown Fritzie do him out of his job. Yar-r-r! An' he's been livin' off'n me six weeks now."

"It's all wrong, Swifty; dead wrong," says I.

"Yes; but who's goin' to care?" demands Swifty.

"I am, for one," says I. "You 'phone home for this hero cousin to come right over, and if I don't land him in work before the week's out I'll pay his board until I do."

"Now you're saying sump'n'," says Swifty.

Course, I don't mean to play myself for any quick-action philanthropist. I was plannin' on unloadin' the cousin on Mrs. Boomer-Day right off. But, say, an hour or so later, when I'm bein' introduced to Mr. Snipe Gallagher, I begun to have my doubts.

No need to ask why he was called Snipe. With a nose like that he couldn't escape it.

If he'd grown as high in proportion as his nose was long he'd been eight feet tall. But he hadn't. In fact, he must have stretched that skinny neck of his when he passed the examinin' board. They couldn't have picked him for his beauty, either; for besides the lop ears and the pop eyes, he has a whopper jaw that gives him about as mismated a set of features as you could find. And as if he wasn't tough enough lookin' at his best, what does he costume himself in but a ragged old gray sweater and an over-sized suit of clothes that should have gone to the Belgians two seasons ago. Still, there is something kind of appealin' in that twisty smile he gives you.

"What you done with the uniform?" I demands.

"Ah, I got sick enough of that on the other side," says he. "I only put it on Sundays now."

"Better get the good of it before your three months are up," says I. "What branch were you in over there?"

"S.O.S.," says he. "First off, they had me drivin' a truck, but after that I got stuck with an emergency repair outfit—reg'lar flyin' garage, you might say."

"So you got to know something about tinkerin' up gas engines, eh?" says I.

"Did I?" says Snipe. "Say, if you'll show

me a motor I couldn't take apart and put together blindfolded I'll eat a brake-linin'."

That listened encouragin'. An extra chauffeur who could put a crimp in the repair bills ought to be worth while havin' around.

"Harken to me, Mr. Gallagher," says I. "Chase home and button yourself into the old khaki once more; treat yourself to a close shave and a scrub behind the ears, and brush up the overseas cap. Also shine up your campaign shoes like you was due for dress parade. Then report back here before 5 o'clock. If all goes well and nobody makes any bad breaks, you'll have as swell a job wished onto you as any buck private could ask for."

"I sure could use one," says Snipe, grinnin' generous. "Swifty here is a perfectly good cousin—for a couple o' weeks at a time. After that he's a 20-minute egg."

Well, before leavin' I gets Mrs. Boomer-Day on the wire and announce how I'm bringin' out a returned soldier that needs reconstructin' the very worst way.

"Why, how splendid!" says she. "Is he—that is, has he been badly wounded?"

"Well, not exactly mangled," says I; "but the gas got him, and he was near bein' bumped off by a shell."

"Isn't that interesting!" says Mrs. Boomer-Day. "What experiences he will have to tell!

I do hope, though, he will be somewhat useful. What can he do, for instance?"

"Oh, only expert chauffing and all-round repairing," says I. "He'll keep your cars tuned up so you'll forget what repair bills look like."

"Really!" says she. "How fortunate for both of us."

Yes, it looked that way. For when Snipe Gallagher appears in his fightin' clothes he don't seem more'n half as tough as he does in his South Brooklyn civilians. Course, you wouldn't mistake him for any Y.M.C.A. secretary or a movin' picture soldier, and there's no way of disguisin' such a nose as his unless he wore a gas mask constant. But you'd guess at a glance he'd used that uniform at the front.

Mrs. Boomer-Day squeals delighted when I tows him in, and the next thing I know Snipe has been hired at ninety a month and found, and is being asked to tell all about what he did in the great war.

"Me?" says Snipe. "Oh, mostly I laid in the mud under some motor truck that had been put out of commission."

"How charmingly modest!" says Mrs. Boomer-Day. "But you must have taken part in those dashing advances when the Hun invader was swept back out of dear France?"

"I dunno," says Snipe. "Mainly I was under trucks."

"In what great battle, though," insists Mrs. Boomer-Day, "was it that you were shell-shocked? Château Thierry, St. Mihiel, Belleau Wood?"

"It's by me," says Snipe. "It was somewhere in the mud."

Mrs. Boomer-Day does that baby pout of hers and turns to me, sort of disappointed. So I takes a hand.

"Maybe you can remember where it was you got gassed?" says I.

Snipe massages his left ear reflective and then a look of almost human intelligence flickers into them pop eyes. "Yea-uh," says he. "That was a muddy spot, too."

"Ah, come, Gallagher," says I; "didn't you run across anything else in little old France but mud?"

"Not much," says Snipe. "It was the muddiest war I was ever in."

And as I leads him off to show him where his quarters are, out in a double-breasted brick garage that looks like a young city hall, I speaks a few plain words in his ear. "You're a bird, you are, Snipe," says I. "Come near queerin' yourself first rattle out of the box. Now listen—next time the lady taps you for war reminiscences see that you turn on some reg'lar horrors for her, and for the love of Mike forget the mud."

"Huh!" says Snipe. "That was the kind of mud you don't forget easy."

Still, Mrs. Boomer-Day is a persistent old girl, and I was bankin' on her pumpin' some thrillin' tales out of Snipe sooner or later. The reports I get through Sadie, though, don't tell of any progress along that line.

"She thinks he must be rather stupid," says Sadie. "He doesn't seem to know where he was or what he did during all those months he was at the front. And as for learning anything new —why, he can't even learn to stencil designs on furniture. He has just spoiled a whole breakfast room set trying."

"Then she'd better be satisfied to keep him as chauffeur," I suggests.

"But he's such a weird looking creature in livery," says Sadie. "Have you seen him wearing a cap?"

I hadn't. I gathered though, that Snipe's nose wasn't built to go with a low vizor, and that the Boomer-Days, after one glimpse of him on the front seat of the limousine, had given him a permanent detail to the housekeeper's market roadster. They're mightly finicky about the looks of things; 'specially Mrs. Boomer-Day, who's a chronic social climber. Course, she don't fail to advertise how she's helpin' a shattered hero back to health and fortune, but she ain't strong for exhibitin' him in public. And

then, right in the midst of the social season, she turns her big trick.

"What do you think, Shorty?" Sadie announces one night at dinner. "The Boomer-Days are going to entertain a real English lord."

"Well," says I, "he'll be entertained all right, unless Mrs. Boomer has paralysis of the tongue or something like that. Where'd they round him up?"

"Oh, Mr. Boomer-Day met him in a business way," says Sadie. "He came with a letter from Boomer-Day's London bankers. He's young Lord Ripley, late of the Royal Flying Corps, and is over here to inspect our aerial mail service. So, of course, Mrs. Boomer-Day insisted on asking him out for the week-end. He's coming to-morrow afternoon."

"Then I see where the gold service plates comes out of cold storage once more," says I. "Wonder if they'll hide Snipe Gallagher in the sub-cellar durin' the royal visit?"

"Oh, I nearly forgot the tragic part," says Sadie. "Their regular chauffeur has developed a perfectly amazing boil on his neck and can't bow respectfully without almost killing himself. They had a rehearsal this afternoon, and he simply collapsed with pain. Now they are trying to drill Gallagher for the part. You see, he has to meet Lord Ripley and Mr. Boomer-Day

at the station, and they're afraid he'll do something dreadful—like not jumping out to open the door, or forgetting to touch his cap."

"Wouldn't that be awful!" says I, grinnin'.

"It might call Lord Ripley's attention to him," says Sadie, "and you know Gallagher isn't—well, he isn't decorative, to say the least."

"Couldn't they hang something over his nose?" I suggests.

"They've decided to make him wear his khaki uniform, anyway," says Sadie, "and that will be some improvement. But Mrs. Boomer-Day is sure he'll do something to mortify her. And, by the way, she thinks that perhaps you might talk to Gallagher and suggest a few things."

"Me?" says I. "How do I get rung in on this?"

"Why, he thinks you're just about right, you know," says Sadie.

"He never told me anything like that," says I. "But even so, what could I tell him about meetin' the nobility? If I've got a short line, it's that."

"Rubbish, Shorty!" says Sadie. "You know how a chauffeur should act. Anyway, they're going to send him around in the morning, to take you down to the station, and you can coach him a little then. He'll listen to you. Tell him not to slouch behind the wheel; that he mustn't

be smoking a cigarette when he has anyone in the car, and that if by any chance Lord Ripley should speak to him he must touch his cap and say, 'Yes, my lord.' Things like that."

"Oh, boy!" says I. "Me teachin' court etiquette! Say, that's good enough to go in a joke-book."

All the same, though, when Snipe rounds up with the rollin' boudoir at 8.03 next mornin', I spring it on him. "Hey!" says I, "am I subbin' for the nobility?"

"I expect so," says Snipe, unreefin' one of them crooked grins.

"Then hop out and untie the door," says I. "That's it. Now pull the salute stuff. Ah, make it snappy, can't you? Yes, that's better. Know what comes next?"

"Where to, sir?" says Snipe.

"Perfectly rotten!" says I. "That ain't the line at all."

"Oh!" says Snipe, catchin' his breath, "I forgot. Where to, my lord?"

"Well, that might pass," says I, "unless he happens to be fussy, which he probably is. You better say it over again when we get to the station."

"Gee!" says Snipe, "I been sayin' it all night in my sleep. You know, Professor, they nearly got me scared stiff over meetin' this fool lord. How should I know what to do?"

"You don't mean to say, Snipe," I demands, "that this is your first lord?"

"Ab-so-lutely," says he. "And I hope it'll be my last."

"Most likely it will be, unless you buck up," says I. "And just remember, if they catch him lookin' cross-eyed at you the very least they'll do will be to give you the quick can."

"I wisht I was back drivin' a truck," sighs Snipe.

Well, as a general thing I ain't much of a hand to rubber around at such times, but havin' been made sort of responsible for Snipe Gallagher, I'll admit I got kind of curious to see how he would get away with it when the time came. So, instead of taking the 5.15, as usual, I quits the Studio early enough to catch the 4.03 express. And by hoppin' off the smoker I'm in time to slip behind a baggage truck close to the scene of action.

Snipe is right on hand, too. He's been scrubbed and brushed until his old uniform looks like it had just come from the Q.M., and he's standin' as stiff as if he'd been dipped in glue and set out to dry. Only his right arm is twitchin' nervous, preparin' for the salute, and there's a sort of a panicky look in them pop eyes. I didn't dare whisper to him for fear I'd break the spell.

And in a minute here comes Boomer-Day,

steppin' along brisk and important, the way little men do, and sort of steerin' by the elbow a tall, good-lookin' young chap who's wearin' a plain business suit and a soft hat with the brim bent down in front. Behind them trots another young gent, dressed about the same, but luggin' two kit-bags. Course, I spots the pair as his lordship and his man.

They'd got almost to the limousine when Boomer-Day turns to give some directions to the valet, and about then I hears a gasp from Snipe. Almost the same time the young chap stops in his tracks, stares a second at Snipe, and then sings out cordial:

"Oh, I say! If it isn't the Blessed Yank!"

"The Flyin' Buddie!" says Snipe.

"You bloomin' old rotter!" says the other, grabbin' him by the hand and pumpin' his arm up and down. "Whatever are you doing here?"

"Oh, Gawd!" says Snipe, startin' sudden and glancin' around. "I'll get busted for this sure. I'm down here to meet a fool lord. See? I'm drivin' this bus for Boomer-Day, and he's liable to show up any minute with—— Gosh! There he is now!"

Yep, there he was. And he is turnin' purple in the gills as he sees who his chauffeur is shakin' hands with.

"Must be some mistake, Yank," says the young chap, his eyes twinklin'. "I'm the only

guest Boomer-Day has with him this trip, and you wouldn't call me a fool lord, would you?"

"You?" says Snipe, grinnin', relieved. "Aw, say! Same old kidder, eh? Remember that time we was hung up in that cabbage cellar while Fritz was——"

I didn't get the rest of it, for just then someone touches me on the arm, and I finds Boomer-Day standing there nearly speechless.

"McCabe," says he, "could—could you kindly tell me why that idiot chauffeur of mine is pounding Lord Ripley on the back?"

"It's by me," says I; "but they listen like a couple of old college chums."

"Impossible!" says Boomer-Day.

"Then why not crash in and find out?" I suggests.

Which he finally does.

"My word!" says Lord Ripley. "Here is the one Yankee I was hoping against hope I could find. But I suppose he's told you something about that little affair of ours over there?"

Boomer-Day can't trust himself to speak. He just shakes his head. Then, sort of husky, he adds: "In—in the war?"

"Of course," says his lordship.

"All I've heard Gallagher mention," says Boomer-Day, "was about the mud."

"Oh, yes!" says Lord Ripley. "Beastly mud, too. But that's where the Blessed Yank

came out strong. It was up on the Flanders front. I'd been having a lively little show all on my own with a big Fokker. I'd winged him once, and was diving to get under him for a finish round, when the lucky beggar put a stray shot through the feed pipe and my motor went dead. Down I goes, just at dusk. Oh, I was planing all right but I couldn't quite make back of our lines. Landed near enough between two shell holes; but it was no place to stop. Only the dark and fog saved me. If the Huns had turned a machine gun on me! But they didn't.

"And somehow I wriggled back, found one of our observation posts, convinced the bally lieutenant I wasn't a spy, and got taken through the wire. But how I did hate to leave the old bus out there. And our squadron headquarters forty kilometers or more away. Well, I'd paddled through miles of communication trenches when I ran across this mired-in American unit, with a perfectly good machine shop on board. They'd been sent out to tinker up some of our ammunition lorries, and the sergeant in charge was a decent sort. When I asked him if he had a spare mechanic who was willing to take on a job out in No Man's Land he said he'd call for volunteers. It was Gallagher here who stepped out. Also it was Gallagher who went back with me, through all that soupy landscape, helped me

bluff my way past the line, and fitted me out with a new copper feed pipe, almost under the very nose of Fritz. They heard us, of course, and shot the fog full of holes trying to locate us; but Gallagher carried on as if he was doing the job in a back area. And inside of half an hour we had the old bus going and were sailing out of that. Do you wonder I called him the Blessed Yank from then on? Or that I kept at our major until he had Gallagher transferred to our shops. Eh, what?''

Course, we stands there, Boomer-Day and me, gawpin' at Snipe, who is grinnin' foolish and starin' admirin' at Lord Ripley. All of a sudden he comes out of the trance and remembers his job.

''Where to, sir?'' says he, salutin' zippy.

''Home, you beggar!'' says his lordship, givin' Snipe a dig in the ribs. ''And see that you wait up for me after dinner to-night. I'm coming out and smoke a pipe or so with you, old son.''

I heard he did it, too. Also, I'm told that during most of the dinner Mrs. Boomer-Day had to listen while Lord Ripley told her what a ripping sort her substitute chauffeur was.

But it wasn't until Monday night that I had any direct word from Snipe himself. He comes over on purpose to spill the news to me.

''Do you know what, Professor?'' says he.

"That Flyin' Buddie, he—he's a lord, after all."

"Seems to be a regular guy, though," says I.

"You bet he is!" says Snipe. "And, say, that ain't the best of it. He's fixin' to keep on with the flyin' game—air passenger service out of London—and he's signed me up as head mechanic. I'm quittin' the Boomer-Days next week."

"That sounds like you'd fell into something good, eh?" says I.

"Good?" says Snipe. "Why, man, I'm ridin' on the world!"

As I remarks later to Mrs. McCabe: "It's a poor war, Sadie, that don't work out well for some."

XII

WHEN EDGAR PLUS FORGOT

If it had been 'most any of the neighbors but Edgar I wouldn't have minded a bit. He's the last one though that I wanted to see crash in at just that particular time, and of course it was him that came.

You see, I was entertainin' ex-Corporal Buck Kinney. It's got to be kind of a Saturday night habit of mine. Must have begun a couple of months ago when I finds Buck waitin' patient out in the lee of the garage with his old trench coat collar turned up around his ears and his overseas cap pulled down inside of that. I discovers he's got a date with Helma for a dance or something down at the village and is stickin' around while she does up the dinner dishes and gets herself ready. Knowin' that Helma is about as swift as a Portchester local with sleet on the tracks, and that it'll probably be well after nine before she finishes gettin' all that taffy-colored hair puffed over her ears, I asks Buck in where it's warm. And on second thought I tows him in by the livin'-room fire-

place, wishes a gilt banded cigar on him and makes him feel like a reg'lar person.

Why not? Ain't he Rockhurst's star war hero, winner of the D.S.M., and all that? And by workin' up to it easy, puttin' in a fool question now and then, I've found you can really pump more or less details out of him as to how we licked the Huns. You got to go at it just right though, or he'll close up like a clam. But gradually I've been collectin' a pretty fair hist'ry of the great war, as fought by a certain machine gun comp'ny whose number we won't disturb Mr. Creel by mentionin', even at this late date.

Well, on this special evenin' I had Bucky nicely started tellin' about a little side show he attended at a place he'd found for me on the map, but neither of us could pronounce, and he's right in the middle of the most thrillin' part when Sadie breaks in on us sort of excited and whispers to me that this Mr. Sherwood is in the lib'ry.

"Good!" says I. "Give him that subscription volume of President Wilson's speeches and tell him to read himself to sleep."

"But he—he seems to want to see you at once," says she.

"Eh?" says I. "Edgar Plus does?"

"S-s-sh, Shorty!" warns Sadie. "He'll hear you."

"Do the poor prune good if he did," says I. "Can't you shunt him some way?"

"No, I can't," says Sadie decided. "And what's more, Shorty McCabe, you ought to be ashamed to talk that way about Mr. Sherwood. You know he's such a nice man."

That was just it. I did know that Edgar was a perfectly nice man. Anyway, I'd heard it said times enough. Mainly by women. Uh-huh. Sadie had even gone so far as to say that he was a regular dear. Mrs. Purdy-Pell, who is about as rough a critic of the safety razor sex as you'll find, never handed him anything but kind words. As for Mrs. Boomer-Day, she cooed and gushed over him almost as if he was a pet Pekinese. Why, even Helma couldn't show Edgar in the front door without workin' up a mushy grin.

Mind you, I ain't sayin' that Edgar don't deserve it all. I suspect he does. Nor I don't mean either, that Edgar is one of these regulation wrist-slappin' parlor-hounds. So far as looks go he has all the marks of a perfectly good he-man. Even to the whiskers. Oh yes, his dark chestnut Vandyke is about the richest crop of facial herbage our cute little suburb can produce. And the way he keeps it trimmed is the last word in tonsorial art. A tall, well built party, Edgar is, too. Looks like he could step into the ring and go ten rounds any time. I

ain't sure but he could at that. He plays golf some, holds a big silver cup to prove that he's our local tennis champ, and is said to be quite a fencer. Also, while it's true he did marry a bunch of money when he picked out that meek little Miss Parsons as a wife, nobody can accuse him of livin' off her income. Course, he's only a four-eyed expert, but I understand he's the big noise in one of the swellest firms of opticians on Fifth Avenue; one of these exclusive joints where you lug in a $25 oculist's prescription and they set you back twice as much for a new set of panes. Anyway, he pulls in the coin. You can tell that just by glancin' at the size of the establishment he keeps up.

Admittin' all that though, I've never been very strong for Edgar. For one thing he always has that air of being so blamed sure he's all right. Not just chesty or cocky. Nothing so common as that. But he has a calm, quiet way of sizin' you up, sort of cold and superior, that makes me want to muss him every time he comes near.

I expect it's due to the way he's been brought up, being the only boy in a fam'ly of four girls, and having a mother who's always petted him. And now that he's married, with his own mother and wifie's mother both living with him, it's just the same, only more so. Oh, I've see 'em at it.

When dear Edgar comes in they all rush around trying to do things for him. And after he's kissed 'em all in turn, and presented a box of flowers to one, and some candy to the other, and a little trinket to the third, they just sit and gaze at him admirin', listenin' close to all the wise talk he cares to unload. You know the brand—the fireside hero type. That's why I call him Edgar Plus.

The most maddenin' part of it all is that you can't seem to pick any flaws in Edgar. "Such a dear, thoughtful man," says Mrs. Boomer-Day. Yes, I got to admit that he is. He's always pattin' wifie on the cheek and tellin' her how nice her hair looks, and what he don't do for those old ladies wouldn't be worth doing. He don't smoke, or drink, and I couldn't imagine him rippin' off a cuss word or two, even if he'd hit his thumb with a hammer. Almost too good to be true, Edgar is.

The trouble with that kind is that they can't help remembering it. You can't blame 'em so much. If I was told every night and mornin' what a wonder I was maybe I'd get that way myself. I'd be playin' up to the part, the way Edgar always is. Makes 'em soft in the head. You know; the little things they do get thrown up big.

So I wanted to duck Edgar just then. But

when Sadie gets on that tone, and sort of narrows her eyelids there's only one wise thing to do—compromise.

"Oh, well!" says I. "If it's going to break anybody's heart, chase him in here."

I couldn't imagine what it would be this time. When he called on me last it was a case of helpin' him chase off a stray cur, part bull and part several other breeds, that had wandered in and was tryin' to make a meal off Pom-Pom, the little bunch of white wool with pink eyes that he'd given Mrs. Sherwood for a birthday present. And when I'd pried the pup out of the near-bull's teeth, Edgar had lugged him off triumphant to have his women-folk tell him how brave and strong he was.

"Well," says I, as he comes in, "it ain't Pom-Pom again, is it?"

"Yes," says he, breathin' a bit gaspy, "it is."

And accordin' to his tale the fam'ly pet had been stolen early that morning. He'd been missin' all day, and soon after dinner two rough lookin' characters had shown up askin' if it was so that a hundred dollars reward had been offered. Yes, it was. At which they'd produced Pom-Pom, and Edgar was in the act of diggin' up the cash when one of the maids whispered that she'd seen this same pair hangin' around the house before breakfast.

"Oh, yes," says I. "The old game. And you stalled 'em along while someone 'phoned for the police, eh?"

"No," says Edgar; "I didn't care for any possible trouble or publicity. Our chief of police is such a crude person, you know. I merely decoyed them to the garage and locked them in."

"What was the grand idea in that?" I demands.

"Why," says Edgar, "I thought that with your assistance, and possibly that of your soldier friend here, we might overawe them and induce them to give up Pom-Pom without any disagreeable scene."

"Huh!" says I. "You did, eh?"

That's Edgar to the life. He don't want to get mixed up in anything rough or messy. He's played the parlor hero so long that the very thought of having to speak harsh to somebody, or maybe being rung in on an act that don't call for pearl gray gloves, gets him chilly along the spine. Course, if he can shift the bare knuckle stuff onto any low-brow friend like me, for instance, that's another matter. And as I'm doping out his little scheme I gets this happy hunch.

"Oh, very well!" I goes on. "Maybe we'll step over and help you throw a scare into your pair of dog snatchers pretty soon; say in about half an hour or so."

Edgar gasps. "But, my dear McCabe," says he, "you don't seem to realize the situation. Why, I have two desperate characters shut in my garage, with no one but women around the place. I have already been through rather a tense scene with them—they used perfectly vile language when they found themselves locked in —and my nerves are somewhat unstrung. If I should go back now alone——"

"Sump'n fierce, eh, Bucky?" says I, with a grin at ex-Corporal Kinney. "He's got two young toughs shut up nice and safe in a cement garage and if he keeps 'em there much longer they're apt to say, 'Oh, darn it,' or something when he goes back. Almost enough to make your blood curdle, ain't it?"

Edgar pinks up at that. "But I assure you, McCabe," he protests, "that they are vicious looking characters, who would be capable of——"

"Oh, sure!" I breaks in. "They might threaten to bite Pom-Pom's tail. But the fact is, Edgar, you butted in here just as the Corporal was right in the middle of relatin' one of his little adventures over in France. Suppose we let him finish? Let's see, Bucky, you'd got to where you and Slum Dorsett had got lost while out on a scoutin' expedition and you'd stumbled bang into a little party of Huns that was workin' a machine gun. Slum had slipped

on a wet log and gone slidin' right into the midst of 'em and then—tell us what happened next, Corporal."

"Aw, it wa'n't much," says Bucky.

"I know," says I, winkin' at him encouragin'. "Merely one of them little affairs that you used to work up a supper appetite on. But you ain't going to leave a tale like that half finished. There was seven Huns, wasn't there?"

"Only five," says Bucky, "and I expect they was about as much jolted to see us as we was to find them. No gettin' away, though. So I had to wade in. Too close for shootin' but I had the old prong on the gun and I takes a flyin' leap right onto the back of one Fritzie, at the same time stickin' the steel into another. It was more or less luck, o' course, for I got him fair, right in th' guts. Next thing I knew, though, the other three was onto me and we went millin' around there something scandalous; clubbin', jabbin' and gruntin'. It's funny how few remarks are passed at a time like that. Nobody says a word. Just as well maybe, for we couldn't have savvied each other. And it's odd how well acquainted you get in a short time. Say, I'll bet if I was an artist I could draw a picture of each of 'em, even now. One was a pop-eyed little runt with a nick in his left ear and a broken front tooth. Some scrapper he was, too. Shifty on his feet. The other squareheads

was big husks, but pie-faced and logy movin'. Seemed to be sort of dazed. Still, it was one of them that gave me the clip side of the head with a trench spade and I went groggy. As I slumped into the mud with my head in an open ammunition box the little Fritzie unlimbers a wicked lookin' trench knife and piles in impetuous.

"He was just lungin' for my throat when there comes this bang. Seems Slum has got into action and taken a chance with a grenade. Lucky I was underneath, for it does mess up my little friend something amazin'. Clear blew him to bits, it did. I was sprayed with parts of him. And one of the big Huns had an arm blown off. The one I'd jumped on came to life about then so it was still fifty-fifty and we begun the party all over again, slippin' and slidin' around, hittin' out with whatever came handy, clinchin' and breakin' loose, but always doin' as much damage as we could. Once I was sure he'd got me, for he'd picked up my gun and was swingin' it on me; but I managed to duck and grab him by the legs, and as I came up on the other side I gets hold of the spade and while he's on his knees I splits his thick skull clear to the eyes. Which leaves only one Hun in action and I finds Slum kneelin' on him chokin' his tongue out. All that stiff needed was a little jab through the ribs, and then we starts to take down the ma-

chine gun when we hears a relief party comin' through the woods back of us, and you can bet we slid out of that and down the hill without waitin' to collect any souvenirs."

I'd been watchin' Edgar out of the corner of my eye durin' most of this and it sure was entertainin' to follow his motions. First off he could only shudder now and then, as Bucky got too realistic, but pretty soon he forgets that and by the time Bucky finishes Edgar is sittin' on the edge of his chair with his fingers twitchin'.

"You—you killed all five of them?" he finally asks.

"Well, we left 'em interesting stretcher cases, anyway," says Bucky.

"Fancy that!" says Edgar. "Why, both of you must have been trained athletes."

"Yes," says I. "Bucky used to be our local pool champ. As for this Slum party—what was he, Bucky, before they turned him loose on the Huns?"

"Slum?" says he. "Oh, he was choppin' tickets on the 'L' when the draft got him."

Edgar just stares bug-eyed. "I—I don't understand," says he. "I suppose when you got back to your company your commanding officer complimented you for your bravery and recommended you for a medal or something of the sort."

"The Loot?" says Bucky. "Nah! He had a

grouch on that afternoon 'cause he hadn't pulled anything from the mail in two weeks. He bawls us out for bein' late and when I starts tellin' him about the Huns he says to keep that bull stuff to chill the spine of some 'Y' secretary when I go back on leave. If we'd had the gun or sump'n I could have made the stiff eat his words; as it was"—here Bucky hunches his shoulders and rekindles his cigar stub.

"To be continued in our next," says I. "And now, Edgar, we'll trot over and help you dictate your fourteen peace points to them pup snatchers."

He don't have much to say as we walks along. Seems kind of subdued and thoughtful. My guess is that he's framin' up some deep strategy which would let him stay in and quiet the women folks while we rescue the dog and run the rough necks off the place. So I'm a bit puzzled when we get there to have Edgar walk straight to the side door of the garage, produce a bunch of keys, and plan out something quite different.

"May I ask you two gentlemen to stand here," says he, "so that if I should be—er—unsuccessful, you could intercept anyone who came out."

"Eh?" says I. "You ain't plannin' to tackle 'em both—alone?"

"Not precisely," says Edgar. "I hope to avoid any violence. I wish to submit a proposal to them which I have no doubt they will accept."

"Ah, I wouldn't waste any breath on that pair," says I. "Just shoo 'em out and we'll do the rest."

"If you will permit me, however," says Edgar, and with that blamed if he don't walk right in, turn on the electric light and shut the door behind him.

Well, we couldn't hear all that was said. It sounds like Edgar had started in his mild, polite way to put his proposition. The next we heard was a scrappy retort, a scuff of feet on the cement floor, a ky-yi from the dog, and then a wild scramble mixed with dull thuds.

"Huh!" says Bucky. "Listens like somebody had started sump'n."

"That's right," says I, and I expect I was grinnin' some. "But Edgar's orders are to stay outside until something comes through the door."

"It's comin'!" says Bucky as a heavy bang bends the panels.

"Not yet," says I, "but I suspect Edgar was chucked this way. I don't know but a little of that will do him good, too. Woof! I'll bet somebody got jarred then. And there goes another!"

"Aw, let's kick in," protests Bucky. "They're two to one, you know. Zing! hear that smash? Open up, Shorty."

"All right," says I. "Course, it's Edgar's party, but if you say—hey, what's the matter with this fool lock?"

It took me half a minute or so to discover which way to turn the key on the spring lock, and meanwhile the sounds from inside kept gettin' messier and messier. But at last I got the catch loose and we rushes in, ready to pry 'em off from Edgar or sweep up the pieces.

But say, I wish you could have seen the view that met us. Talk about your movie rough house scenes where they flash the big punch act! Here is Edgar, with his hair tousled, his coat ripped up the back and one trouser leg split; but he's standin' steady on his pins and is just steamin' in a peppy left hander that lands square between the eyes of a big husk who's runnin' in like he was anxious to stop it. He does, too, and proceeds to crumple up on the floor with a deep grunt that told mighty eloquent how he'd had enough.

Over in the corner is the other bird, wabblin' back and forth on his hands and knees with the claret leakin' from his bugle like he was a stuck pig. He's quite a husk too, but there's no doubt about his being all in. One of his lamps is swellin' out lovely and by the looks of his

clothes I should judge that he'd been used as a floor swab.

"For the love of Pete, Edgar," says I, "whatever have you been doin' to these two gents?"

"I—I'm sure I don't know," says Edgar, a little puffy. "It—it all happened so abruptly."

"I should say it had," says I. "And I take it you didn't have time to get over that proposition of yours?"

"No," says Edgar. "They proved to be quite unreasonable from the very first, so I—I was compelled to—well, as you see."

"Uh-huh!" says I. "It's what I'd call a finished job, if you ask me."

"Ab-so-lutely," chimes in Bucky enthusiastic. "And you sure didn't waste any time on it."

"I fear," says Edgar, tryin' to smooth out his hair, "that when they became so abusive I quite forgot myself for the moment."

"Take it from me though," says I, "these two birds are goin' to remember you for years to come."

We didn't have to do any urgin' to get 'em to clear out. When I swung open the front door they scrambled through it and off into the dark like a couple of rats being let out of a trap. And after we'd gathered up Pom-Pom from where he was crouchin' in a corner, and shaken

Edgar hearty by the mitt, Bucky and I trails back to the house.

"Say," remarks Bucky thoughtfully, "wouldn't that guy have been a bear in a moppin' up squad?"

"I guess you've stated it," says I.

"What was it you called him when he first showed up?" asks Bucky. "Edgar what?"

"Edgar Plus," says I. "And I got to admit it's a closer fit than I thought."

XIII

SHORTY ANSWERS A HAIL

From some of the calls I get you'd 'most think I had a sign out readin' "Shorty McCabe, Cheerupodist." Take this case where they send the limousine to cart me way up above Tarrytown where Alton I. Frazer has built a near-Moorish palace on top of a hill.

"What's the idea?" I asks Miss Edith when she rings me on the long distance. "Shall I bring up a set of gloves or some gym apparatus?"

"Certainly not," says she, kind of gaspy. "Why, poor daddy's being wheeled about in a chair. He's a very sick man."

"Say," I breaks in, "are you sure you've got the right number? This is Professor McCabe's Physical Culture Studio, you know, and——"

"Yes, I understand," says Miss Edith. "I suppose I'm perfectly silly, but I just want you to come up and talk to him a little while. You see, he hasn't seen a soul for the past five weeks but doctors and nurses. We've had four specialists and each one has discovered something dreadful the matter with him, every time something new,

and he is so discouraged that I—I—— Well, I'm desperate, that's all. I've never seen him give up this way and I just thought—— Oh, I don't know precisely, but he used to seem so cheerful when he was going regularly to your place, Professor, and if you could only——"

"Sure," says I. "I'll come."

Not that I thought it would be any use, but Old Alibi Frazer had tossed over to me many a fat check in his day and I'd be a poor sort of prune to turn down one of my old reg'lars when he was about to take the count, wouldn't I?

I expect you know more or less about him yourself, but whether you rate him as a high class financier or as a first-class crook who has dodged jail depends a good deal on how much income tax you pay. As for me, I ain't sure. Why, when this quiet talkin' little old guy, with the mild blue eyes and the high broad shoulders, first showed up at the studio, I had him placed as some up-state banker who was spendin' the winter in town because daughter was havin' her voice trained to hold high C or something. Then I noticed that heavy chin of his and the solid set to his jaw, so I wasn't so much surprised to find out that he was the big traction plute.

Uh-huh. Suburban trolleys are his specialties. He collects 'em like anyone else would collect liberty bond posters, or pewter mugs, or old

campaign buttons. He'll get his eye on a good payin' line that's somehow escaped being gobbled up by some syndicate, and the next thing the directors know the man who's votin' the majority stock at the annual meetin' will be Alton I. Frazer. Then things begin to happen. There'll be a new issue, a second or third mortgage will be clapped on, the bonds will be juggled mysterious, the sinkin' fund will disappear and most likely the courts will be asked to appoint a receiver. Somehow though he will come out of the deal with a pot of money whose absence doesn't show anywhere on the books, and the local capitalists who financed the road at the start will be wonderin' what hit 'em. Then maybe there'll be a reorganization and another feeder will be added to the Frazer system.

Still, I must say he's always been fair and friendly with me. I got so I didn't even lock up the safe when he came in and after I'd helped him get rid of a bad case of nervous indigestion he sure expressed his gratitude in something besides kind words. In fact, we've been almost chummy ever since. So when the French chauffeur comes up and says how the carriage waits, or words to that effect, I turns the Studio over to Swifty Joe for the day and takes this twenty mile drive up into Westchester County.

I admit I was some jarred at the change in the old boy. Why, it hadn't been more'n eight

months since he'd dropped into the Studio last, smokin' one of them slim panatellas and handin' me his usual line of quiet josh. And here he is humped over in the rollin' chair with his mouth corners sagged and a complexion like the inside of an ash tray.

"Well, well!" says I, lookin' him over. "Who's been kiddin' you into thinkin' you're an invalid?"

He shakes his head and tries to pull that old twisty smile of his. "I'm afraid they're right this time, Shorty," says he. "I—I'm on the scrap heap, I guess."

"Gwan!" says I. "You got a right to another guess, ain't you? Been having some specialists look you over, eh?"

He nods.

"Heart specialist, I'll bet," I goes on; "and they found your blood pump all out of whack, didn't they?"

He admits they did; also that stomach specialists had found fault with his plumbing, and so on.

"Yes," says I, "and if you'd had a foot expert in he'd told you how you had fallen arches, while a lung shark would have insisted that your pipes were clogged. Sure you ain't got a touch of house-maid's knee, or boll weevils in your hair?"

"As I'm feeling just now, Shorty," says he,

"I wouldn't deny harboring any ailment they might name."

"I expect they've made you lay off business?" says I.

"I am just winding up everything," says he. "I'm allowed half a day with my secretary. Here he comes now. Don't go away. I have no more business secrets. Well, Staples?"

Mr. Staples is a slick-haired, cold-eyed young gent who proceeds to spread out his papers and make his reports. He fires facts and figures at Mr. Frazer as careless as if he was talking into a machine, and with sort of a bored air that's as much as to say: "Oh, you don't count any more, so what's the use?" They're some figures too, relatin' how the dividends on this block of preferred amount to so many hundred thousand; how such a deal has been closed at a net profit of half a million, and where another little scheme has been pulled off that will give control of a new line.

But Old Alibi just sits there with his chin down, noddin' now and then at some item, but mainly drummin' his fingers restless on the chair arm. Near as I could judge, the Frazer system was workin' like a mint runnin' double shifts, and any one of them items would have had me doing a war dance. He don't seem to work up any enthusiasm though. Not a bit.

Finally Mr. Staples announces casual: "Oh,

by the way, that Waterbury-Pawtucket enterprise still hangs fire. I think though that those people are about to come to terms. Their Mr. Atkins is here now."

"Si Atkins? Here?" asks Mr. Frazer, sort of rousin' up. "What'll he take now?"

"He wouldn't say," says Staples. "Insists on seeing you personally. I told him it couldn't be done, but he's still waiting."

"Huh!" grunts Old Alibi. "Well, you go down and tell him, Staples—— No, I can't spare you now. Shorty, perhaps you wouldn't mind shooing the old rascal off the premises. Tell him I'm so sick I don't care what he does with his old road. Will you?"

It's a new line for me, but I wanders down stairs and into the big lib'ry, where I finds this shifty-eyed old boy with the white deacon whiskers sittin' anxious on the edge of his chair. And before I can get in my remarks he demands if I represent Mr. Frazer.

"Why, yes, in a way," says I, "but——"

"Then tell him," breaks in Mr. Atkins, "that if he will only listen to a reasonable proposition, we are ready to compromise. Of course we have secured an injunction preventing him from interfering with the extension of our line across his——" And then I cuts in myself.

"Excuse me," says I, "but you might as well save your breath. If it was a plot in a ceme-

tery you wanted to sell, Mr. Frazer might do business with you. As it is, there's nothing doing."

"Wha-a-t?" says Mr. Atkins, kind of gaspy.

"Mr. Frazer is too sick a man to care whether you sell him your trolley line or junk it," says I.

"Sick?" says Mr. Atkins. "Why, I hadn't heard. Sick, eh? Too bad!"

And say, he looked about as sorry as an ex-doughboy just landin' from a transport. "Well, well!" he goes on. "In that case I—I think we have no offer to make."

"Oh, you haven't, eh?" says I, sort of prickin' up my ears. His sudden shift had got me kind of curious.

"No," says he, real prompt. "No offer of any kind. And I think I will merely express a hope for the eventual recovery of Mr. Frazer and——"

"Just a minute," says I, as he's reachin' for his hat. "Frazer ought to know how bad you feel about his being sick, and he might have some word to send back, after all. I'll hang your hat in the hall."

I didn't. I took the hard boiled lid upstairs with me and showed it to Old Alibi. He stares at it puzzled.

"Belongs to your friend Atkins," says I. "I just lugged it along so he wouldn't weep it full of sympathy on account of your being so sick."

Frazer gawps at me like he thought I'd gone crazy in the head. "What triple-plated tommyrot is this?" he snorts. "Old Si Atkins has no more sympathy in his system than a dry lemon and personally he's as fond of me as a cat is of swimming in the pond."

I shakes my head. "Must be some mistake," says I. "He seemed all cut up when I told him how bad off you were."

"Oh, he did, eh?" says Frazer. "Enough so he was willing to sell his road at any terms?"

"Affects him just the opposite," says I. "He wouldn't think about botherin' you with buyin' it now."

Alibi Frazer rouses up at that. He straightens back in the wheel chair with his chin up and a queer flicker coming into them mild blue eyes. "The old fox!" says he. "What's his game, anyway?"

"That's all he said," says I. "I take it he's too tender-hearted to worry a sick man with business."

"Bah!" says Frazer. "You don't know the old pirate. He's got something up his sleeve and by the seven saints I'm going to find out what it is before he leaves this house."

"Oh, I say, Mr. Frazer," protests the secretary, "you know your physicians have absolutely forbidden you to——"

"Physicians be blowed!" says Old Alibi. "Shorty, bring Atkins up here."

"Just as you say," says I.

I had to chuckle, too, at the way my little hunch was workin' out. He'd shaken the slump out of his shoulders and them stubby fingers of his was bunched vigorous.

"You're in luck," I tells Atkins. "Mr. Frazer happens to be a bit easier for the time being and I expect a little chat with an old friend like you will do him good."

That almost gives him a chokin' spell. "But —I——" he begins.

"Ah, come along," says I. "He's sent for you special."

And when I've lined the two of 'em up facin' each other it sure is interestin' to watch their motions. Old Alibi has got a grip on himself once more and gives Atkins the smooth hail, while Si acts about as comfortable as a mouse being introduced to a tomcat.

"Sorry you find me laid up this way," says Frazer, "but I suppose I'm down and out. That's what my fool doctors tell me, anyway."

"I—I was greatly shocked to hear it," says Atkins.

"No doubt," says Frazer. "You see, I haven't advertised the fact—might be bad for the market. Not that I have much interest in such affairs now. I'm just winding things up."

"Y-e-s?" says Atkins, glancin' shrewd at the secretary.

"So you'll pardon me for dropping that Waterbury-Pawtucket deal," goes on Frazer. "I hear, though, that you have concluded not to sell."

Atkins nods.

"Going to develop the property yourself, eh?" suggests Frazer.

"We—we—we might," says Atkins, squirmin' uncomfortable in his chair.

"I guessed as much," says Frazer. "Let's see, that injunction of yours has about two weeks to run, hasn't it? You could put in that crossing if you made a rush job of it, couldn't you?"

For a second the old boy colors up like a kid that's been nabbed robbin' a cherry tree, but all of a sudden his backbone stiffens, his eyelids narrow and he shoves his chin out.

"Yes, Frazer, we could," says he. "It would save us from having to turn our franchise over to you at your figure, and as we are fortunate enough to have the courts on our side this time——"

"Atkins," breaks in Frazer, "how long do you think it would take me to shoot that injunction of yours so full of holes that it would look like a screen door?"

"More than two weeks, Frazer," the old boy raps back at him.

"And meantime," says Frazer, "you would have—— Eh? What the deuce?"

He stops and glares up at the nurse, who has come in with a glass and a spoon.

"It's the half hour, sir," says the nurse.

"That's so," says Old Alibi, takin' the dose meek and slumpin' back into his chair once more. "Never mind me, Atkins. Go ahead—if you can."

I thought I heard Mr. Atkins sigh kind of relieved at that and he lost no time in makin' his getaway.

"Pardon me, sir," says the secretary, "but I think our time is up for to-day."

"Well, it isn't, not by a long shot," says Frazer. "You heard what that old robber had to say, didn't you? But perhaps it hasn't dawned on you just what he means to do. I'll tell you, Staples. Now that he thinks I'm out of the game he means to put in that grade crossing I've been blocking off for the last five years, which would force us to buy at his terms. But he's wrong, Staples. I'm not quite out of it. I have a sneaking idea there's one more fight left in me yet. Anyway, we'll see. Have our bags packed, order the car, and wire Burns to meet me in Waterbury to-night at 7.30."

For a minute Staples gawps at him with his

mouth open. Then he smiles sort of condescendin' and shakes his head. "You forget your condition, Mr. Frazer," says he. "It—it would be suicide. I could not consent to assist you in anything so utterly rash."

"You couldn't, eh?" snorts Frazer. "Then you're fired. Understand that? Get out."

The secretary shrugs his shoulders, gathers up his papers, and trickles through the door.

"I suppose everyone else in this house will act the same," says Frazer. "All afraid of those fool doctors. But I mean to beat Si Atkins if it takes my last breath. How about you, McCabe; will you stand by me?"

"Seeing how I got you into this," says I, "I can't do less."

"Good!" says he. "And if I happen to pass out with my boots on?"

"Piffle!" says I. "You're as tough as a pine knot and a little scrap like this is just what you've been needin' for months. Why, man, look in the glass. You've come halfway back already."

"Shorty," says he, grippin' my hand, "those are the most encouraging words I've heard for weeks. See me through this and you'll not regret it. There's an extension 'phone in that alcove. Here, let me write the number. That's our repair shops. Get Burns, our construction superintendent, on the wire."

And when I'd made the connection I hands over the 'phone to Old Alibi. "That you, Burns?" says he. "This is Frazer. Yes. Meet me at the Wilmot in Waterbury, 7.30 to-night. That's what I said. To-night. And listen, Burns. You know where that Pawtucket crowd want to cut our line at grade? Have a gang there at daylight ready to put in a short switch, say a hundred yards. Send down a couple of those big snow plows, too. Get that? Yes, the rotaries. Good."

Then he turns to me and grins. "I can trust Burns," he goes on. "Now to get out of this. Thank Heavens, Edith is down at the village. Turn the key in that door to the right, will you, and lock out that nurse. That's it. Now if you will throw a few things into my kit-bag. In that room at your left. Bag's on the closet shelf. Pajamas and so on. Pair for yourself. Shaving things in the bathroom. Let's see, where's that check book? Ah! Now I wonder how I can navigate. Little wabbly in the knees, Shorty, but I guess we can manage."

Well, we did. Couldn't have done it much quicker if the house had been on fire. I'll bet it wasn't fifteen minutes before we were down at the porte-cochère with me helpin' load him into the limousine. Frenchy stares some when he gets his sailin' orders, but he salutes snappy.

"Eet ees in Con-nec-ti-cut; yes, M'sieur?" says he.

"Yes," says Frazer. "Due east. You know the way. And a little speed, Henri."

Say, that was some excursion for a man who's just crawled out of a wheel-chair, but Old Alibi settles himself comfortable in the corner, turns on the electric heater, and seems to be enjoyin' every sway and jolt. Next thing I know he's discovered a cigar case in the pocket of his mink-lined overcoat and is lightin' up one of his slim black cigars.

"First in ten weeks," says he. "Lord, Shorty, but it tastes good!"

"If it does," says I, "maybe that's just what you need. Go to it!"

Anyway, he's very much of a live one when we rolls into Waterbury just before dark, and from the size of the steak he orders for dinner I judge that his appetite is coming back to him. And by the time Burns shows up he's pacin' up and down the lobby burnin' his second panatella.

"Why, Mr. Frazer!" says Burns, "I thought you were a sick man."

"So did Si Atkins," says Frazer, "but my friend Shorty here has persuaded me that I'm not. At least, I've escaped those infernal specialists. Now let's get to business."

It wasn't a long session him and the superin-

tendent had, and by 9.30 I saw him tucked away in the feathers with a 7 o'clock call in for the morning. Course, it was a question whether Old Alibi could answer it or not, but blamed if I don't hear him stirrin' around before I'd rolled out myself.

"Sleep?" says he. "I haven't had such a sleep in a year, Shorty. And make that breakfast order about three soft boiled eggs for me, with bacon, coffee and rolls. Tell 'em to hurry it up, too. I'm starved."

"That doesn't listen much like an invalid," says I. "Maybe some of them specialists guessed wrong, eh?"

"You bet they did!" says Frazer. "So did Si Atkins."

And if you'd been on the scene of action a couple of hours later you'd thought so, too. It's some busy little party, take it from me. Burns and his gang was on hand, makin' the dirt fly, and what does Mr. Frazer do but hop out of the car and take charge of the proceedin's.

"Never mind fancy ballasting," says he. "Just get that switch in any old way. Here, Brady, lend a hand on that hacksaw and cut that rail. You, Mike, speed up those men laying those ties. Any signs of the enemy, Burns? Ah, who's that coming down the road? Yes, it's old Si. Got his surveyors with him, too. Surveyors! Huh!"

Sure enough, when the touring car rolls up, there's Atkins with a surveyin' bunch. And you should have seen his eyes bulge out when he spots Old Alibi in the midst of all this activity.

"What—what does this mean, Frazer?" he demands, as he steps out.

"Why," says Old Alibi, winkin' at Burns, "our road superintendent concluded that we needed another switch put in just about here. Enterprising chap, eh?"

"But see here!" protests Atkins, "this is just where our crossing is to come."

"What a coincidence!" observes Frazer. "May make it rather awkward for you, I fear."

"No, it won't!" snaps Atkins. "Not a bit. Remember we have the courts back of us. We'll just tear it up, that's all."

"That will be interesting to watch, too," says Frazer. "Burns, signal those rotaries to run down a little closer. See 'em up there, Atkins? Well, they are to occupy this switch for the next two weeks, longer if necessary, with their snow cutters going; and if you have any spare laborers you want turned into sausage meat just send 'em along."

"This—this is a high-handed outrage," sputters Atkins, turnin' purple under his white whiskers.

"Oh, come, Atkins," says Frazer, "aren't

you a little rough with a sick man? Suppose we step into my car and talk it over. Maybe you'll decide you want to sell your line after all, and then we can stop all this foolishness. Eh? What do you say?"

I couldn't hear what he said, for they were shut up in the limousine for the next half hour. But when they came out he's just stowin' away a check and they parts with a friendly shake. After which Burns shoos away the big snow plows, work on the switch is stopped where it is and we drives back to Waterbury for a whaling big lunch.

. . . . . .

"Huh!" says Swifty Joe, as I shows up at the Studio next morning a couple of hours late. "Took you some time to cheer up that sick plute friend of yours; or did he check out on you?"

"He didn't check out," says I. "In fact, I left him as good as new."

"How did you do it?" asks Swifty.

"Simple enough," says I. "Just sicced him on a few loose dollars and he went after 'em like a terrier after a rat."

"I expect he didn't pass any on to you, though?" says Swifty.

"Only this," says I, exhibitin' a pink slip. "Take a look."

"A—a cool thousand!" gasps Swifty. "Say, of all the lucky stiffs!"

"Oh, I don't know," says I. "It takes more or less knack to pull 'em out of a wheel-chair that way. In fact, it's almost an art."

"Ahr-r-r chee!" says Swifty, out of the side of his mouth.

"It is when you get away with it," says I.

XIV

SHORTY IN A NEW BILL

I EXPECT I'm a little late in gettin' the hunch, but if you really want to know where you stand with the neighbors just let some of your so-called friends ring you in on local politics and wish a little two by four office on you. Say, it's more illuminatin' than an X-ray picture or havin' your bumps read by a headologist.

Here a while back I was nursin' along the idea that my ratin' as a citizen of Rockhurst-on-the-Sound was along about fair to middlin'. Course, when it came to finances, I didn't count myself in with the plutes and near-plutes; among our little bunch of high-brows I knew I was a flivver; and if it was a case of social rank I'd be classed among the also-rans every time.

Yet I'd lived out here quite some time without havin' to face the judge from the wrong side of the court room; I'd always paid my taxes prompt; I hadn't run off with anybody's wife; nor I hadn't traded in my liberty bonds for wildcat minin' stock. I was servin' my fourth term as director of the Yacht Club, I'd

helped organize the Citizens' League and I'd subscribed to all the funds, from the Armenian appeal to the one to raise a permanent memorial to our war heroes. I'd even been referred to as "our esteemed fellow townsman, Professor McCabe," in the last annual report of the Committee on War Gardens. Right out in print, too.

So when I gets word that I've been picked to fill in this vacancy on the School Board I ain't as much surprised as some might think I'd be. Course, I starts in by making a noise like a man sufferin' from ingrowin' modesty.

"Well, wouldn't that frost a cake!" I remarks, turnin' to Sadie. "Me named to help run the schools! And I never even got through the eighth grade myself. Say, I'll make a fancy educator, I will. I guess somebody must have pulled a bone."

"I'm sure I see nothing strange about it," says Sadie. "I think it's rather a compliment, Shorty, though nothing more than you really deserve."

"Good girl, Sadie!" says I. "I might know you'd stand up for me. And if that's the way you feel about it, blamed if I don't give the thing a whirl; yes, even if I have to wear a pair of eyeglasses on a black ribbon to dress the part."

I got to admit though, that way inside of me

I could feel something swellin' out my ribs in front. Member of the Board of Education! Eh? Wasn't that comin' along some? 'Specially for a guy that started where I had. I couldn't help wonderin' what some of the old gang would say if they should hear about it—the ones I'd known back in the days when I was meetin' all comers who could make the weight, when I was figuring strong in the sportin' columns and earning the big end of the gate receipts by hammerin' other young gents around a roped platform. Huh! Wouldn't the news get a gasp out of 'em?

That pleasin' frame of mind lasts until I begun gettin' the returns from some of my good neighbors. It was about the second mornin' that the news seemed to have spread general among the commuters on the 8.03, and they sure had a merry time joshin' me on the way into town.

"Hey, Shorty!" says one, slappin' me on the back. "Where have you been concealing this brainy stuff all the while?"

"Oh, that's simple, with pin heads like you," says I.

"Do I understand, Professor," says another, "that you mean to add a course of applied pugilism to the high school curriculum?"

That gets a big laugh from the cross seats where a bridge game is going on.

"Say," says I, "if the Board wants to start a class in comic kiddin' I can name some who'd qualify for the kindergarten department. Come now, anybody else with a wheeze he's been savin' up for me?"

Not that most of it wasn't good natured and all that, but the fact remains that my having anything to do with managin' the schools is considered a joke. Oh, yes. That seems to be the general view. It's unanimous, you might say. Even Mr. Purdy-Pell, who seldom forgets his family tree long enough to smile at any common party, has to get in his little crack.

"Congratulations, McCabe, on the new civic honor which has come to you," says he, "although I was unaware you were at all interested in pedagogy."

"I didn't know I was either," says I, "until just recent. Sudden attack. I'm just bugs on it."

And not until I'd got to the Physical Culture Studio and looked up the word in Swifty Joe's dollar-down dictionary was I sure he was tryin' to be humorous.

Course, I'm no thin skinned, sensitive party who can't stand a josh now and then, but when I finds I'm furnishin' mirth for the whole town it kind of got me wonderin' if I wasn't overdoin' the thing. You know. You don't mind doing

the clown act occasional if you take the part with that understandin', but when the crowd begins to guy your serious lines that's something different.

So when I gets home that evenin' I pikes down to the village right after dinner and hunts up Brick Hogan. He's the ex-boss of our district, Brick is, and until the Citizens' League got busy and busted up his machine he ran our local politics with one hand and his contractin' business with the other. I must say, too, now that I've got to know him better, I think he made a better job of it all 'round than our mixed bunch of high-brows, ministers and prominent business men. And allowin' that Brick did get his rake off on street openings, pavin' contracts and so on, I ain't sure but he was worth every dollar of it.

It was a couple of years ago that we rose up in our might and chucked out the Hogan crowd, and all the grip on public affairs we left Brick was this hold-over job on the school board, where he's been in a hopeless minority. Since then though I've been revisin' my opinion of Brick—maybe I told you once how I caught him red-handed supportin' the children's ward at the county T. B. hospital out of his own pocket—and gradually we've established more or less friendly relations. So when I decides that I

wants the details of this Board of Education appointment that strikes everybody so humorous I goes straight at Brick.

"Who was the bright comedian that thought that up?" I demands.

"Guilty," says Brick.

"Eh?" says I. "You! What was the big idea, anyway? Can't you amuse folks some other way than by makin' me a public joke?"

He's a big, heavy, slow motioned man, Brick Hogan, who always seems half asleep even in the midst of a hot debate. If it wasn't for them keen, steady eyes of his you might think his brain acted sort of sluggish. But you'd be badly fooled.

"Shorty," says he, "did you ever hear anyone accuse me of being a humorist?"

"No," says I. "Everything but that."

"Well," says Brick, "then there's your answer. When I saw a chance of slipping you in on the Board I did it because I knew you'd be a useful member. If you must know, Shorty, I'm good and sick of these amateur reformers. They're a lot of quitters."

He is just explainin' how one of 'em had resigned because the monthly Board meetin' interfered with some of his dinner party dates, and that four other prominent citizens had sidestepped an appointment to fill in the term.

"So when they were all through," says Brick,

"I suggests your name, and before they knew where they were at the motion was carried. Then I rushed the recommendation over to the mayor and had his appointment confirmed by the Council within an hour. So there you are."

"I had a hunch it must have happened something like that," says I. "But honest, Brick, I have half a mind to get from under. Course, I'd like to help you push through that playground proposition and do a little boostin' for a new high school buildin', but if they keep pullin' this joke stuff on me I'm liable to mess somebody serious. It's gettin' on my nerves already."

"Bah!" says Brick. "Don't mind 'em. Let 'em yawp. That's all a bunch of commuters is good for anyway. They ain't interested enough in town affairs to take hold themselves but they're mighty free to roast anybody that does. They make the poorest lot of citizens you could—— Eh? Was that someone knocking?"

It was. And when Brick sings out for 'em to come in who should slide through the door but the Hon. Hiram Dishler. And for fear you haven't heard about the Hon. Hi before I'll state that he's the big noise in Rockhurst-on-the-Sound. Oh my, yes! He's chairman of the Citizens' League, president of the First National, chief stockholder in the Nut and Bolt Works, and the heaviest owner of undeveloped

real estate in the county. You could almost guess that by the white banker side whiskers he wears and the stiff way he holds his neck. He's the sort of party you wouldn't like to have holdin' a mortgage on the old home, or meet at a poker table with the limit raised. When he discovers me danglin' one leg from the corner of Brick Hogan's flat-topped desk he seems to get quite a jolt. But he recovers quick.

"Ah, McCabe!" says he. "How fortunate. For I had come to consult Mr. Hogan as to this —er—somewhat hasty appointment of yours. Now I can speak directly to you both."

"Looks like you could," says I. "Shoot."

"It is quite possible," says the Hon. Hi, "that you have not decided to accept the office or that you have not considered the thing seriously."

"Serious?" says I. "Why, as I've just been tellin' Brick, it seems to be one of the funniest acts ever pulled in Rockhurst."

The Hon. Hi sort of sucks in his breath relieved. "Then—then you will decline?" he asks.

"Why should he?" demands Brick.

"I think the reasons are obvious enough," says the Hon. Hi. "McCabe would not claim to be an educated man, I am sure, and on the school board we expect——"

"How about your man Bixby, the shoe-

maker?" breaks in Hogan. "Call him a high-brow, do you?"

"Mr. Bixby," says the Hon. Hi, stiffenin', "represents a certain element of our constituency which the Citizens' League was bound to recognize. Besides, he is one of our leading shop keepers and a reputable citizen."

"Now we're gettin' somewhere," I put in. "And when it comes to me—— Say, I expect I'm a blot on the 'scutcheon, eh?"

"I had hardly intended to go into that," says the Hon. Hi, "but since you force the issue I must remind you that your previous career in the prize ring——"

"Oh, come!" breaks in Brick Hogan. "Shorty isn't a prize fighter now. He hasn't been for years, and you know it. He's a property holder, a family man, and he behaves himself. So what are you beefing about?"

"If you will allow me," comes back the Hon. Hi, crisp and snappy, "I would suggest that your indorsement, Mr. Hogan, is no longer of value to any candidate for office in this district. In fact, it is more apt to raise suspicion against the person you support."

"Yes, I understand all that," says Brick, hunchin' his shoulders. "You spotless reformers are ready to believe I've got hoofs and a forked tail, which doesn't worry me a bit. You've made a sad mess of running public af-

fairs and the voters are beginning to get wise to you. So every move I make gives you shivers up the spine. You know that Brick Hogan can come back. And I'm going to do it next November. But I haven't started in yet. McCabe isn't one of my strikers. He's one of your own men, and you were glad enough to have his help as long as he kept in the background. But when I try to put him in a place where he can be really useful you throw a fit. Now my advice to you, Dishler, is to lay off."

The Hon. Hi springs one of them sarcastic smiles of his. "Your views are neither novel nor interesting," says he. "As for your advice, I shall disregard that utterly. I think it will take me but a short time to convince McCabe that he should at once resign as a member of the Board of Education."

"Listens menacin', that does," says I. "Go on, I got my ear stretched. Suppose I'm mulish enough not to quit?"

"And I'll bet you a hundred to ten that he doesn't," puts in Brick. "What then, Dishler?"

"Our course will be very simple," says the Hon. Hi. "We shall be obliged to remind the citizens, in a somewhat public manner, that an ex-pugilist is hardly the person to be entrusted with the conduct of our schools. If McCabe wishes to have his past——"

"Say," I breaks in, "if you think there's any-

thing in my ring record that I'm ashamed of you've got another guess."

"Still," says Dishler, "in this connection it might have the desired effect if all the details appeared in print at the time a petition for your removal was being circulated."

And, say, he was dead right. I could see that with one eye shut. The Hon. Hi had the editor of the local paper right under his thumb. He could make him jump through a hoop. "Pugilist on School Board." That would make a nice headline, wouldn't it? 'Specially for a lot of women voters to read.

"Dishler," says I, "when I meet a skunk in the road I don't argue with him as to who has the right of way. So you win. My entry is scratched."

"Scratched nothin'!" growls Brick Hogan. "Wait. If Mr. Dishler wants to dig up past records I guess we can accommodate him. He's lived a few years himself and maybe there's one or two little incidents in his career that ain't buried so deep but what they could be dragged out. Anyway, I know of one in particular." And them keen eyes of Hogan's is fixed steady on the Hon. Hi.

"Bah!" says Dishler, starin' back at him. "Everyone in this town knows that my life has been as an open book."

"Yes, you've got most of 'em buffaloed, I'll

admit," says Brick. "But I happen to know of a page or so in that book that's been gummed down."

"Just what do you mean by the innuendo?" demands the Hon. Hi.

"I expect it was what you'd call a little romance," says Brick, "although I should say it was kind of late for that sort of foolishness. In the forties, weren't you? And you must have had a swell time squaring yourself at home, too. But you did it. Hushed up the girl, too."

By this time the Hon. Hi was twitchin' his fingers and gettin' purple behind his white side whiskers. "This—this is a baseless slander, Hogan, and you are well aware of it," he finally gets out throaty.

Brick is leaning across his desk, them eyes of his never waverin', and one of his big ham fists stretched out. "Shall I tell you the young woman's name?" he asks.

And say, I never expected to see the Hon. Hi squirmin' like that. Twice he opens his mouth to say something, but each time he chokes it back. Then, after he's paced nervous up and down the little office a couple of turns, he seems to get a grip on himself.

"This is absurd, Hogan," says he. "Whoever told you such a ridiculous story must have been——"

"It didn't strike me as so absurd or ridicu-

lous," says Brick. "I didn't get it second-handed, either. You know you hadn't treated her quite right. Not the way you'd promised. And she stood it without a whimper until she was nearly down and out. Then she came to me for help. They used to, you know, when I was runnin' the district. Even now. She didn't mean to tell. But when I began asking questions—well, it came out. The whole story. Not much proof beyond her word. Only a scribbled note or so. Possibly not enough to go before a jury with. But I could find a lawyer who would take her case."

The Hon. Hi is pale now, but he's got over his case of fidgets. He hunches his shoulders careless. "Very well," says he. "But the very day you start such an action I shall have you both arrested on a charge of blackmail."

"Of course," says Brick. "You might get away with it, too. And I expect you could keep it out of the papers. But that wouldn't stop it from being circulated. Oh, no, Dishler. It would be whispered in corners at the clubs, passed around on the train, gossiped about at teas and dinner parties. It would spread until there wasn't a grown person in Rockhurst who hadn't heard of it. You think you have a lot of friends, eh? Just test 'em out with this and see whether they'd rather believe the best of you, or the worst."

He'd made a great actor, Brick Hogan. Just that voice of his, low and clear and heavy, would have made him a Broadway star. I've often thought as much. And now he sure was registerin' on the Hon. Hi. First thing I knew Dishler has slumped into a chair, his chin on his neck-tie, and is starin' at the floor. He'd got the picture.

"But—but this is infamous!" he groans.

"How about what you're plannin' to put over on Shorty?" demands Brick.

"I—er—perhaps I was mistaken about that," says Dishler. "If you really wish him to retain the office——"

"I do," breaks in Brick.

"Then—then I have no doubt that it could be —er—arranged," says the Hon. Hi.

"Good!" says Brick. "We'll fix it up right now. Shorty, it's all right. I'll let you know to-morrow."

Uh-huh. It was all right. I never heard the details of that private confab him and Dishler had after I left, but the *Rockhurst News* didn't feature me in any scare head. And the joshin' sort of dropped off.

All the same, I didn't feel like makin' myself prominent at the Board meetin'. I sat still and didn't lip in on the debates. If it hadn't been for Sadie insistin' that I go every time I guess I'd have ducked some of the sessions.

And then here one day I gets a new angle on my job. It's handed to me right across my own breakfast table. Little Sully passes over his monthly report card for me to sign. Well, I'd always done it after a hasty glance to see that he hadn't been absent too often and his conduct marks wasn't below par.

But this time, rememberin' some talk at the Board about changin' the cards, I looks it over kind of curious.

"What's the P stand for after geography, Sully?" I asks.

"Ah, it tells at the top, don't it?" says he, sort of sulky.

"So it does," says I. "Poor, eh? I take it you ain't much of a star at geography."

"I hate it," says Sully. "That old Skinny Simmons, she—she's a poor prune, she is."

"Why, Sully!" gasps Sadie. "The idea of you talking that way about one of your teachers. Shorty, why don't you stop him?"

"I expect I should," says I. "But then, most likely he don't mean it. Eh, Sully?"

"I do," insists Sully prompt. "She's no good. You ought to see. Say, Pop, if I was helpin' run the schools, like you are, I'd give her the chuck."

"There, there, son! That'll do from you," says I.

Yet when I got to thinkin' it over afterward

it kind of struck me that there might be something in Sully's complaint. Youngsters don't always get down on their teachers without good cause. Course, they do sometimes. And who's to find out? There ought to be—say, hadn't I heard something about a teachers' committee? I'd ask Brick Hogan. He'd know.

"Sure there is," says Brick, "and you're chairman."

"The blazes I am!" says I. "And what am I supposed to do?"

"Oh, you're supposed to hire 'em and fire 'em," says Brick. "As a matter of fact though, we usually leave that to the superintendent and just O.K. his list."

"I see," says I. "Do the rubber stamp act."

"That's about all," says Brick.

I scratches my head for a minute or so, and that seemed to stir up an idea. "See here, Brick," says I, "I ain't strong for playin' that kind of part. This superintendent guy may be all right, and then again maybe he's the kind that plays favorites. Strikes me we ought to get a line on the ones we're payin' out good money to. Couldn't we kind of sleuth around a little?"

"Sure we could," says Brick. "That was the original idea only—well, we've seldom had anybody on the Board who'd take the time to do it.

But if you really want to make work of your job——"

"I'm just foolish enough for that," says I.

So that's how it happens me and Brick Hogan began taking an afternoon off every week to spend visitin' the different class rooms. I'll admit I felt kind of foolish the first few times, sittin' up there on the platform with the young lady teachers all fussed up and some of the kids gigglin' behind their books. But after a while I got kind of used to it and the youngsters got used to seein' me. I got 'em to understand I didn't want any exhibition stuff pulled for my benefit, but just wanted to see the reg'lar work.

It did take a good deal of time, and it was a month or more before I got what I thought was a slant that was worth while. My first clue was that Miss Simmons hated to teach geography almost as much as Sully hated tryin' to learn it. But I noticed that the window boxes in her room was the best in the building. She had all kinds of flowers in bloom, bulbs shootin' up, even radishes and lettuce growin'. And a couple of times I found her with a bunch of kids around showin' how the things grew.

Then there was Miss Mathers, who had arithmetic and spelling. Kind of a giddy, flossy young party, Miss Mathers was, who frequently looked like she'd been out late to a dance the night before. Yet she could drill the scholars

through the times table and so on after a fashion. She has to admit that they were a stupid lot, though. Their report cards proved it.

Yet the same kids, when they got into Miss Sawyer's hist'ry class, seemed to pep up a lot. She had a trick of readin' stories that wasn't in the book at all, about Indian fightin', and what Daniel Webster had to say about the woodchuck, and so on. She did a lot of explainin', too, and got the boys askin' questions. Made the lesson kind of a game. Had 'em smilin' and laughin'.

"They're such bright, interesting children, aren't they?" she says to me.

"Seems to depend on where they are," says I.

Course, that wasn't statin' it exact. But I hadn't quite got the thing framed up. When I did though, and sprung it on the Board one night, you should have heard what I ran up against.

"Do I understand," says the Rev. Pedders, the Episcopal rector, who was supposed to be our leadin' highbrow, "that you would hold the teachers responsible for the failure of their pupils to pass examinations?"

"Something like that," says I.

"Rather a unique theory of education, isn't that, McCabe?" he remarks. "In other words,

if a scholar was dull you would blame the teacher?"

"Uh-huh!" says I. "And if enough dull ones showed up in her class I'd either fire her or try her out in some other line."

"H-m-m-m!" says the Rev. Pedders, rubbin' his bald spot. "Revolutionary. Quite. You know we have been following a principle exactly the reverse of that for a good many years."

"Yes," says I, "but how does it work out? Now I used to be a star at geography, because we had a teacher who made kind of an outdoor sport of it. Why, even now I'll bet I could bound what used to be Germany, and a hot lot of good it does me with the map of Europe shiftin' like a summer thunder cloud. But suppose we'd had that kind of a teacher when we tackled grammar? I might have been a long haired poet by now, or writin' best sellers for the department store trade. I claim it's up to the teacher to make good. Anyway, if I'm going to stick on this committee I'd like to see the scheme tried out."

"And I move," cuts in Brick Hogan, "that Chairman McCabe be granted full powers."

Say, when the debate had run along until past midnight I thought I'd started something. First off the opposition had us beaten 5 to 4, but the next thing I knew the Rev. Pedders

swung to my side and the motion was put through.

I've been at it six weeks now. Some of the teachers I've released; some I've shifted around. Miss Simmons, for instance, has dropped geography for botany and domestic science. She's making a go of both and had her pay raised. But every teacher understands that if she can't keep the kids interested in her branch she's liable to get the bounce. "The McCabe idea" is what the Rev. Pedders calls it —half joshin', you understand. But he's backin' me strong. Tells me he's writin' it up for some magazine and wants my picture. What do you know about that? If I keep on gettin' popular they'll be namin' a cigar after me next. When they do I'll send a box to the Hon. Hi Dishler.

No, never another peep from him. Looks like he'd been bottled up and the cork driven in. The other day when I was in Hogan's office lookin' over the plans for the new school playgrounds something called up that little séance we had with the old stiff.

"Brick," says I, "you sure had the goods on Dishler that time, eh?"

"Seemed so, I suppose," says Brick.

And that got me prickin' up my ears. "Seemed?" says I. "Why, unless you had the

facts how could you nail him so pat? Don't tell me you do the clairvoyant stunt."

"Not exactly," says Brick, puffin' thoughtful on his cigar. "It was a fairly good guess though."

"Ah come!" says I. "With them respectable white whiskers of his how could you have the nerve to play such a long shot unless——"

"There are times, Shorty," says he, "when it's better to know men than it is to hold cards. And I've noticed that the stiffer these old parties carry their necks the more apt they are to have some little thing like that buried in the back lot. I didn't actually dig anything up. I just flourished the spade."

"Say, Brick," says I, drawin' in a long breath, "I'm glad I ain't got anything in my past that needs chloride of lime on it. As it is I'd just as soon you turned them lamps of yours the other way a minute while I steadies my nerves."

And Brick, he chuckles easy.

XV

WHAT AUNT ABBIE HAS COMING

"Well, Miss?" says I, throwin' it over my shoulder sort of crisp and important.

Not that I was tryin' to be any more of a crab than usual, but just to give her the quick hunch that she's pushed through the wrong door.

You'd 'most think, with a sign on the door in big black letters, that women would have better sense than to come crashing into a physical culture studio at all hours. Most of 'em do, too, but there are enough who don't to make it interestin'—stray stenographers trailin' down new jobs, and young ladies collectin' for various war funds, or huntin' for Mme. Riley, the corsetière, whose place is across the street. But generally they dash out again about as quick as they dodge in, mostly without stoppin' to explain, 'specially if Swifty happens to be loafin' around the front office in his low-cut gym suit.

Not this one, though. Instead of retreatin' panicky, or even answerin' my snappy hail, she

stands there quiet, sizin' us both up. She's a high, skimpy built party, with a waist about a yard long and a neck like a turkey. Maybe she wasn't six feet, but she didn't lack much of it. Her cheek-bones are kind of prominent; likewise her upper front teeth; and one of her eyes don't exactly track with the other.

"Yes?" I goes on, winkin' humorous at Swifty. "What'll it be?"

At that she comes out of the spell. "How do I find Mr. Zubel?" she demands.

And say, hearin' this deep, full voice come from that skinny throat almost gives me the jumps. It's so unexpected.

"Eh?" says I. "The Honorable Abe Zubel? His offices are on the next floor up."

"I know," says she. "And I suppose he is in them somewhere. But how does one get past that frowzy-headed person in the outer room?"

I hunches my shoulders careless.

"It's by me," says I. "What I don't know about theatrical managers in general and Mr. Abe Zubel in particular is amazin'. I've always understood, though, that they were shy birds. And as that's the limit of my valuable information, why——"

Here I waves invitin' towards the fresh air.

She hadn't come in to be shunted out with a mere wave of the hand, though. She only steps up nearer the desk.

"You're Professor McCabe, aren't you?" she asks.

"You've guessed it," says I.

"Then, with rooms right on the next floor to his," she goes on, "you ought to know of some way that I could get to see him."

"Young lady," I protests, "didn't I——"

"Tuttle is my name," she cuts in. "Pansy Tuttle."

Course, that chokes off the sarcastic remark I was about to spring. For, while she says it quiet and easy enough, some way she makes you stop and listen to her.

"Oh, yes," says I. "Pansy Tuttle, eh? You did say Pansy, didn't you?"

She nods.

"Hollyhock would have suited better, I suppose," says she, "but I was quite small when they chose Pansy. Go on; smile. I'm quite used to it.

"I've spent nearly a week tryin' to get in touch with Mr. Zubel," she goes on, "and now somebody must help."

"But why me?" says I.

"Why not you?" asks Pansy.

That brings out a snicker from Swifty.

"Young lady——" says I.

"Tuttle," says she.

"Well, then, Miss Tuttle," I begins again,

"maybe it ain't occurred to you that I might have something better to do than——"

"You don't seem remarkably busy," says she, glancin' at my elevated heels.

"Camouflage," says I.

"If you mean you're only pretending not to be busy, you do it very well," says she. "But surely it wouldn't take you long to suggest some way that——"

"See here!" says I. "If Zubel don't want to see you, I can't think of any way you can make him."

"Then," says Miss Tuttle, settlin' back in her chair, "I shall wait here until you do."

" Wha-a-a-at!" I gasps.

"Oh, you will have a splendid idea presently," says she.

"Say, what is this, a siege?" says I.

She nods and favors me with a quirky smile. It's about as folksy and chummy a smile as I ever saw executed. And say, when she does it that face of hers changes so you'd hardly know her for the same party.

"Tryin' to land a typist's job with him, eh?" I asks.

"Oh, no," says Miss Tuttle. "Mr. Zubel is engaging people for a new musical review. I want a place in the chorus."

"You—you do?" says I, gawpin' at her.

Course, driftin' up and down the stairs, I see

some odd specimens that are candidates for the hi-yi-yip ranks. But this Miss Pansy Tuttle looks about as much like a chorus girl recruit as I do like a lounge lizard. She's the kind that would be safe anywhere.

"Say," I goes on, "where'd you drift in from, anyway?"

"Cohasset," says she.

"Co-which?" says I. "Eh? Oh, yes! Is it in Indiana or Maine?"

"Massachusetts," says Pansy.

"Good!" says I. "In that case you can be home by to-morrow morning."

Pansy smiles and shakes her head.

"I've left Cohasset forever," says she. "I came to New York to go on the stage, and I mean to do it."

She don't say it cocky or braggy; just states it quiet and determined, like she was tellin' cook how she'd have her eggs.

"Listens like you meant it," says I. "Are you always like that?"

"It's the Tuttle way, I suppose," says she.

"Oh!" says I. "You're from one of them old baked-bean families, eh, such as we read about?"

"We go back far enough, goodness knows," says she. "I have been told that father was a direct descendant from Deacon Jedediah Tuttle, who was expelled from Plymouth colony in six-

teen seventy something for taking off his boots in church. We've been doing such things ever since. Father, for instance, was educated for the law; but after losing his first case he never went into his office again. Instead, he started in to make a living as a locksmith and bell-hanger. The village boys used to call him 'Hellbanger Tuttle,' so he had it painted on his cart, and kept it there in defiance of the selectmen, who tried to make him paint it out. And I—well, I'm a Tuttle, you see."

"I get a glimmer," says I. "You got to do something different, too. But why not tackle something easy? Why get the chorus-girl bug?"

Pansy shrugs her shoulders.

"It isn't that I'm stage-struck," says she. "It—it's—well, if you must know, it is the only thing I can do that will really satisfy Aunt Abbie."

Naturally, that leaves me with my mouth open, so Miss Tuttle goes on to explain. This Aunt Abbie was someone she'd been livin' with ever since she was sixteen. She's a well meanin' old girl, Auntie, so far as that goes. She had lots of good points—swell cook, A1 housekeeper, strong on church work, and her plum preserves couldn't be beat. But her tongue-brake wouldn't hold.

"Suppose you had to live with someone,"

goes on Miss Tuttle, "who was forever and everlastingly discussing your faults and failures, your weaknesses and your shortcomings? That's what I used to get from Aunt Abbie. Now, I am fully aware that I'm plain, to say the least. Yet it wasn't cheering to be told, at least once every twenty-four hours, that my chin wasn't what it should be, or that the cast in my eye shower plainer when I was tired. And it didn't help to be eternally assured that I was cut out for an old maid."

"Oh, well," says I, "we all have to have relations."

"Aunt Abbie was more than that," says Pansy. "She was an affliction. And the worst of it was that she was not satisfied to say such things to me in private. At sewing circles, at church sociables, at little afternoon gatherings for tea and cake and gossip, I was dished up—oh, yes, rather entertainingly, I admit. 'Yes,' Aunt Abbie would end up with, 'when Pansy gets too old to sing in the choir or give music lessons, she'll open a tea-room in the old house here, and sell braided rugs and bayberry candles to the summer folks.' And they would all nod their heads as if it had been settled.

"But it hasn't. I despise tea-rooms. I loathe bayberry candles. I may have to stay an old maid, but I'm not going to be that kind. Not while I'm a Tuttle. Not while there's any

hope of escape. I've gotten this far, anyway. I'm supposed to be visiting a cousin in Portland—and here I am. More than that, here I stay until I have given Aunt Abbie and all her friends something that they can talk about until their jaws ache. So there!"

She straightens back in her chair, smooths the ugly brown plaid dress over her knees with her long fingers, and gives me another of them quirky smiles.

"Miss Tuttle," says I, "I get you. You're out to hand Auntie a jolt, and I guess jumpin' from a church choir into the chorus would do the trick. And all I got to say is, go to it."

"Thank you, Mr. McCabe," says she.

"Still," I adds, "I don't see how I can help you with Abe Zubel. Honest, I don't. For, if you don't mind my sayin' so, you ain't just the style they pick out. He's sure to turn you down."

"Perhaps," says she. "But I want him to hear what I have to say first. It wouldn't hurt him to listen, would it?"

"That's reasonable enough," says I; "but——"

"I'll tell you," breaks in Miss Tuttle. "Send for him to come down here."

"Eh?" says I, gawpin'.

"He knows you, doesn't he?" she goes on.

"He would think—— Well, never mind. He'd come. And that seems to be my only chance. Just think of my having to go back to Aunt Abbie."

"You win," says I. "Hey, Swifty! Go up and tell Zubel that Professor McCabe wants him to come down here right away. If he asks why, give him one of them nobody home looks of yours and do a repeat. Get me?"

Swifty grins, which is a sure sign he's rootin' for Pansy.

Sure enough, too, in a couple of minutes back he comes, towin' Mr. Abe Zubel. For a party who has his name printed so conspicuous on the bill-boards, Abe ain't impressive to view. There's only about five feet one of him up and down, and a little less from east to west. Also, the top of his head is squared off graceful, like the roof of a freight-car, with about as much hair on it. He spots Pansy, sittin' over there by the desk, right off the bat. And just from one glance at the back of her head he seems to work up suspicions.

"Vell?" says he, cockin' his head on one side. "You vant to see me, Professor, and you can't climb the stairs?"

"Not exactly the idea," says I. "It's the young lady."

"Ach!" he snorts. "So you got a friend too? They all got one. Yes, even the boot-

black on the corner. But they should see Mr. Werner first. What does he tell her, eh?"

"The one with the frizzly hair?" says I. "Why, he tells her she won't do, I expect. But——"

With that he turns for a quick exit. But Swifty Joe is quicker. He puts his back against the door. Zubel almost butts into him.

"One side, low-brow!" snaps Abie.

"Ah, why the panic, old slate-roof?" says Swifty, glarin' down at him. "Just come, ain't yer? Can't yer stick an ear out for the lady a minute or so?"

At which Pansy catches her cue, rejoints herself into her full five feet ten and joins the group.

"Please, Mr. Zubel," she begins, "can't you use me somewhere in your new piece?"

Abie stares at her bug-eyed, takin' in all the details of her build—the juttin' front teeth, the periscope neck effect, and so on.

"You?" he gurgles throaty. "Use you? Am I bug-house completely? No, no, no!"

"But why couldn't you?" asks Miss Tuttle, steady and quiet.

I knew about what was comin' then. I'd heard more or less of how rough Zubel was with his show people, 'specially women.

"Why?" he snarls, rollin' his eyes and workin' his heavy jaws. "Young woman, one

of the songs we're going to do calls for the whole chorus as diving Venuses. Vell? How would you look as a diving Venus? Hey? You'd be a joke."

"Aren't you looking for jokes?" she asks. "It strikes me that as a diving Venus I——"

With that, she hunches up one shoulder, sticks her long arms out awkward, with her fingers spread, and throws him one of her reverse-English smiles.

And I'll bet that Zubel himself couldn't tell you now what crisp come-back he was about to counter with. For he never got it out. Just then we hears this spluttery, choky sound over by the door.

It comes from Swifty Joe. You might think he was havin' a fit, but he's only registerin' mirth. Pansy had scored her first hit.

Another thing I've heard about Abe Zubel is that he's the sportiest plunger of the whole producin' bunch. I forget whether it's four or five really new acts that have been tried out in musical shows durin' the past ten years. Anyway, they credit Abe with havin' been the first to take a chance on most of 'em. He may be no mental Colossus, but he's a shifty thinker. Them restless little shoe-button eyes of his flashes back and forth between Swifty and Miss Tuttle only a couple of times before he's made the connection.

"Hah!" says he. "Hold it! Now that business from the side of your mouth again. Good! Very good! It would get 'em. Yes. But it would be in the wrong place. It isn't a funny song."

"That's too bad, isn't it?" says Pansy.

"No!" snaps Zubel. "It don't matter. Not at all. The words—— Bah! We can make 'em funny. The music, too. It's only the costumes that cost, and they're all ordered. But see here: can you sing?"

"I make my living that way," says Pansy.

"Let's hear," demands Zubel. "Oh, anything—la-la-la."

She's right there with the vocal stuff, Miss Tuttle. And with a speedy performance, too. Never even plays for an openin' but takes him at his word and proceeds to trill out the la-la-la's, trippin' light across the floor as she does it, and almost throwin' Swifty into another convulsion by that burlesque finish of hers.

"Fine!" roars Zubel, clappin' his fat hands. "We'll have that Venus song changed to a comic, and we'll use it to close the second act. You'll do it in black silk Annettes, as a solo, with forty show girls in white as a background, and if it ain't a sure-fire skookum, then I don't know a pinochle deck from a cheese sandwich. Come! I want you to meet Mr. Werner."

And say, I guess Abie's picked another win-

ner. The other day he breezes in with this bulletin about the try-out in Troy.

"Honest," says Abie, tappin' me enthusiastic on the chest, "she's a female De Wolf Hopper. Funny! Why, they begin to laugh so soon as she comes on. And they never stop. I've got to fill in a week in Boston with her, and then—Broadway for a two-year run."

"Boston first, eh?" says I. "But say, does she really wear them—er—that——"

"Wait!" says Abie. "I'll send you down the new two-sheet of her in costume. It's a perfect likeness."

Swifty Joe was stretchin' his neck over my shoulder when I unrolled the poster.

"Swifty," says I, doin' it up hasty, "run out and get me a map of Massachusetts."

"Map?" says he. "What's the idea?"

"Why," says I, "seein' how Pansy's usin' her own name and all makes it interestin' to locate Aunt Abbie. I want to see how near Tremont Street this Cohasset place is."

Yes, we saw. Just a trolley ride out. And now I'm figurin' if it wouldn't be worth while takin' the trip, just on the chance of spottin' Auntie at a matinée.

XVI

SITTING IN WITH JIMMY

Maybe you'd say that the odd part of it was my being in the Plutoria at all. Well, it ain't my reg'lar luncheon joint, I'll admit, for I know of several places where you can get a small steak without payin' for a whole steer. In fact, I wasn't plannin' to eat there at all. But there are days, like when I'm sportin' a new spring suit and an early straw lid, that I feel like driftin' in among the idle rich, givin' 'em the once over and duckin' out again. It can be done, you know, without partin' with a nickel. The sensations are something like climbing into the pilot's seat of a big bombing plane and then stepping out again.

At the Plutoria I'd pushed in through the main entrance, crossed the marble lobby and was just passin' the dizzy blondes guardin' the hat check department of the Pink Grill when I gets this hearty hail:

"Well, well! Shorty McCabe, eh? How's the boy?"

It's roared out loud and rollin', and was like bein' paged by megaphone. Three or four

parties turns curious to see who answers to such a name and I expect I was blushin' in my modest, shrinkin'-violet way until I spots this bird in the frock coat and the lavender tie.

"Huh!" says I. "Might know it was you, Jimmy Fincke, by the steam siren whisper. What you think you're doin'—announcin' a train?"

"Same old Shorty," he chuckles, poundin' me on the back.

"Maybe," says I. "But you ain't the same old Jimmy."

"I should hope not," says he.

If that was a wish it had come true. For the J. Fincke who used to run a garage up on the Post Road was a ruddy-faced, clear-eyed husk who was generally costumed in a blue jumper and overalls with a smooch or two of grease on him somewhere. He was always ready to hand out a line of josh, boss a tire shiftin' job and charge you double on the time slip. He had one of those round honest-to-goodness faces, a deep boomin' laugh, and if you didn't allow for the shifty eyes or have any prejudice against a cleft chin you might believe he was as good as he said he was. Anyway, he was popular with his customers, and for a garage man, that's sayin' a good deal.

Course, he was a yawp. You know, noisy. Everybody's friend. Got away with it, too, in

most cases. But if you knew him long enough it gradually began to dawn on you that the one particular party he was out to help most was Jimmy Fincke. 'Specially after you'd paid a few repair bills. Still there was a lot to like about Jimmy. So he made good. I watched his shop grow from a roadside shack to a big, double-breasted concrete affair with two storage floors and a fancy office.

I never knew until later how much Mrs. Fincke had to do with buildin' up the business. Used to see her in there evenin's working on the books, but it wasn't until Jimmy came to me with his financin' scheme, when he wanted to put up the new buildin' that I found out it was the wife who was the backbone of the enterprise. Jimmy really didn't think he could swing the proposition, which included interest on a $25,000 loan and a big overhead load. But when Mrs. Fincke had sketched out her plans and showed me on the books the business they'd done durin' the last year, I helped 'em get their notes endorsed.

She had some head on her, Mrs. Jimmy. Nothing ornamental, but not such a bad looker at that. Daytimes she put in eight hours reg'lar as private secretary to the manager of the Nut & Bolt works, a job she still held onto even after she married Jimmy. Then evenin's she'd hustle home, get dinner, and drive down to the

garage with Jimmy, where she'd stay until 11 or after postin' the books and givin' him pointers. Course, after they branched out so big she didn't have to do the bookkeepin' herself, but she was there a lot, keepin' an eye on things.

And the next I heard was that Jimmy had sold out to one of these chain garage corporations and had bought a controllin' interest in the Nut & Bolt concern. That was durin' the second year of the big war, when we were just beginnin' to find out where we were at, and the first war-baby plungers were gettin' in their fine work. Jimmy was one of the early birds. It seems Mrs. Fincke was hep to the fact that the Works stood to pull down some big shell contracts from the English and French, and before the deal was closed she and Jimmy had bought in. From then on it was just one bold jump after another, but always something to do with war contracts. And by the time the rest of us was worked up to the point of makin' the world safe for democracy the Finckes knew it was safe for them whatever broke. They had dividends rollin' in from so many companies that Mrs. Jimmy had to hire a private secretary of her own. As for Jimmy, he took to struttin' round afternoons in a frock coat and throwin' dollar tips at bell-hops.

About then I begun to lose track of him.

Once at a movie show, when they were windin' up a Liberty loan drive, I heard a familiar voice boom out something about taking a $10,000 bond if ten others would match it with hundreds. And I had to smile when I saw it was Jimmy. He was a patriot and didn't care who knew it. Not a rap. I think he'd gone up on the stage if he'd been urged. Another glimpse I had of him was durin' Red Cross week. He was drivin' down Fifth Avenue in a taxi and tossin' new silver quarters by the handfuls at pretty girl collectors. Outside of them two times though I hadn't had a real close-up of Jimmy for more'n a year and a half. And here he was clawin' me on the shoulder in the Plutoria.

"I say though, old man," he goes on, "but this is a piece of luck, running across you. Just the one I wanted to see."

"Ye-e-es?" says I. "You'd forgotten the number of the Physical Culture Studio, had you?"

"Not me," says Jimmy. "Been meaning to drop in. But to-day—say, Shorty, how about having lunch with me? Ah, course you can. Don't mind waiting around half an hour or so first do you? You see—I—well, the fact is, I'm due for an interview with someone and I'd kind of like to have a third party present, 'specially an old friend like you."

"Oh, well!" says I. "If it's a case of witnessin' your signature on an option, or something like that, maybe I can."

Jimmy shakes his head and I notice them shifty eyes of his roamin' restless up and down the corridor. "Not exactly," says he. "It—it's with Fannie."

"What!" says I. "Mrs. Fincke?"

"Why, yes," says he. "That is, she's the Mrs. Fincke you knew."

I expect I must have been gawpin' at him by then. "You don't mean there's a new one, Jimmy."

He nods careless. "Oh, yes!" says he. "Hadn't you heard? Why, we split up long ago—year and a half. Nobody's fault in particular only—well, Fannie couldn't seem to keep up. I don't know as you'll understand. But she never was much of a spender. Always did come easy to me. What's the good of a lot of money if you can't get some fun out of it? Besides, there's certain things you're expected to do when you get in with our crowd, unless you want to be listed as a piker. None of this gentleman farmer stuff for me. That was Fannie's idea—way up state somewhere. Not for Jimmy. I had enough of that when I was a youngster. Yea-uh! Now I don't want to get any closer to Nature than a roof garden table under a potted palm, and as for feeding the

chickens—I can do that any night right on Broadway. So we—— Well, we quit, that's all."

"Too bad, Jimmy," says I.

"Yes, I know," says he. "Does sound sort of raw without the inside dope. Don't remember them hats Fannie used to wear, I expect? Trimmed 'em herself. I didn't mind when every dollar counted. But she couldn't break the habit, even when we got where she might have cabled to Paris for a ship load. I'd see the ladies sizin' her up and nudgin' each other—wives of men in our bunch. And her dresses. Almost as bad. Bargain table goods. Made me feel like a cheap-skate. I tried to tell her. No use. She only cut out going around with the nice people I'd got in with. Well, I wasn't going to sit home and twiddle my thumbs. I went without her. There was no grand smash, you know. We just fixed it up about gettin' the decree, and each went our own way."

"I see," says I. "But how does it come that you're waitin' here for her now?"

"Just business," says Jimmy. "I'm getting from under, closing out. And there's one plant that we hold joint interest in. It's a case of finding out how much she'll give, or take. My fool lawyers couldn't fix it by mail and arranged this. Huh! She's half an hour late now."

Jimmy has his watch out and is pacin' up and down.

"Ain't seen her since, eh?" says I. "Must seem kind of odd."

"It does," says Jimmy. "Honest, Shorty, I feel like I did once when I was kidded into making a speech at a banquet. Stage fright. How's that for me, eh? Gettin' shivers up the back just at the prospect of havin' a few words with Fannie. I shouldn't have picked this place. She—she'll show up worse than ever here, I expect. But I didn't want to parade her before those lawyers, either. I wonder what's delayed her. It isn't like Fannie to be late for a business engagement. That was one thing she drilled into me. Besides, if she don't show up pretty soon Beryl is liable to come floatin' in."

"Beryl?" says I.

"She's the new Mrs. Fincke," says Jimmy. "We—we live here, you see, and she often comes down to join me at—at breakfast. I can't get used to this tray in your rooms stunt. Oh, I can go the coffee and rolls there, but about this time of day I want a reg'lar feed if I'm going to last through."

See what I'd been rung in on just by strayin' in where I didn't belong? Triangle stuff. And say I could think up a lot of noon-day pastimes more cheerin' than this sittin' in at a reunion with an ex-wife. Still, Fannie

never had been one of the weepy kind. I didn't look for her to throw any cat-fits, so the affair might not be harrowin'. Might even be sort of interestin' to see how she took it, being in the discards. Anyway, I was in for it.

We'd camped down in a couple of them carved high-back chairs that must have been designed 'special to discourage the loafin' habit and I had a chance to size Jimmy up curious. He'd developed something of a forward sponson, as the gobs say, since he'd been livin' so high. And he sure wasn't born to wear a frock coat. No. Now in his old blue jeans he'd passed with the ladies as real easy to look at. I believe it was Mrs. McCabe who once made the remark that she thought Jimmy would be almost handsome if he could be properly dressed up. And I got to admit, ain't I, that Sadie ought to be a good judge?

But this hunch of hers about Jimmy was all wrong. I can't say how it was exactly, but in that tail coat he looked like a garage man who'd borrowed some weddin' clothes. Absolutely. And as if he was struttin' in 'em. Besides, he'd lost the color from his cheeks, he had the beginnings of bags under his eyes, and above the stiff collar the chin cleft stood out more prominent than ever. He sure was accumulatin' a case of nerves, too.

"Hang it all!" says he, squirmin' around in

his chair, watch in hand. "Here it is nearly 12.30 and——" The rest was almost a gasp.

For as he turns to stretch his neck the other way there she is, right in front of him. I'd seen her, as a matter of fact, before he had, but I hadn't been quite sure. You see, I was sort of lookin' for a tacky appearin' middle-aged woman, dressed all in black most likely, and with one of those rummy lookin' home-made lids that he'd been describin'.

But say, while this party had the same calm, serious eyes that I used to see fixed on the books in J. Fincke's garage, and wore the same neat brushed hair, there sure wasn't anything duddy about her costume. Not that she suggested havin' just stepped out of a fashion review. It's a plain, simple tailored effect of navy blue with a straw sailor to match. But some way there's plenty of zipp to the way it's been built on her. Looked like she's grown into it. That kind of a fit, you know. I'd never mistrusted she had such a good figure. Why, if I hadn't known she must have been well on towards forty I might have guessed that she was anywhere from twenty-two to thirty. No more.

Nor is she luggin' any doleful, cast-off-wife face to the conference. I don't know that I'd ever seen her look quite so chipper and chirky. As she spots Jimmy them dark placid eyes kind of open up and she springs an easy smile.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, Jimmy," is her greetin', "but you simply can't depend upon train schedules now, can you? I've been on the way ever since last night, too. I do hope you can give me some luncheon while we're making our trade, for that government dining-car breakfast I had wasn't worth talking about. Oh! And here is Professor McCabe with you. How nice! Do say you'd planned luncheon for three, Jimmy."

And after a desperate glance at me Jimmy lied cheerful and led the way into the Pink Grill, where three waiters helped us get settled at a window table with a big bunch of flowers on it. I couldn't see, either, but that all his worryin' about how she'd show up among the other lady guests at the Plutoria was more or less useless. If there was anyone in sight who looked and acted very much at home it was Fannie.

"Couldn't we have the floral tribute taken away, Jimmy?" she suggests. "I want to get a good look at you. There, that's better. M-m-m-m! How long since you've been wearing coats like that? The proper thing, I've no doubt, but—— Well, I suppose it's because I've never seen you in one before. How's the health, Jimmy?"

"Mine?" says he. "Oh, I'm all right."

"That's good," says she. "Heavier, aren't

you? Quite a bit, eh? And I'll bet you've been keeping late hours. Still having good poker luck? But those merry little midnight suppers are telling on you, Jimmy. I can see by your eyes. Running with the old crowd, eh?''

''Hasn't sent me to a hospital yet, you see,'' comes back Jimmy. ''You're looking well, Fannie. Got the farm, I suppose?''

''A perfect whale,'' says she. ''Three hundred acres, counting woodland. Only ten miles out of Cooperstown.''

''Only!'' echoes Jimmy. ''How does that listen, McCabe? Ten miles out of Cooperstown. Good Lord! Isn't it kind of lonesome, especially at night.''

''At night I'm asleep,'' says Fannie. ''And daytimes—— Well, besides all the help, I have Myra and her children.''

''Myra!'' Jimmy gets out husky. ''You!''

''Why not, Jimmy?'' asks the late Mrs. Fincke. ''It's nothing to you now, is it, even if she is your sister? And you know we didn't treat her quite right all those years. We might have helped more. Oh, yes, we'll admit that Sam wasn't much of a success as a brother-in-law, or at anything else. But that wasn't Myra's fault. We shouldn't have blamed her for sticking up for him, either. I never did, really. So when I heard he'd gone, and that she was left with those three kidlets—well, I

went straight to her and made it all up. She was rather bitter about it at first, as was only natural. She'd heard about our luck, you see; and she a waitress in a quick lunch place in Buffalo. But I won her around, apologized for both of us, and got her to come with me to the new farm. There was none of my own folks I could get hold of."

"Huh!" says Jimmy. "Three kids. I should say you'd got your hands full now."

"Why, I'm having the time of my life with those youngsters, Jimmy," says she. "I suppose they'll have to have a governess in the fall, but I'm putting it off until then. That little Sam is the brightest boy. And wise! He's only nine, but he began selling papers on the street when he was six, and what he didn't pick up—— Well, I found him showing the boss dairyman how to shoot craps one day. You ought to see him drive a motor truck around the place. Says he means to run a garage when he grows up, like his Uncle Jimmy. One of the little girls is going to be a beauty. Oh, I have lots besides my Holsteins to make life on the farm worth while. Honest, Jimmy, I'm just beginning to live."

"It's a great life if you don't weaken," says he. "But it wouldn't suit me worth a cent."

"I know," says Fannie. "The bright lights for you, Jimmy. Oh, well!" And she tackles

an order of shad-roe and bacon enthusiastic.

I could see Jimmy watchin' her with sort of a queer look in his eyes. I had a notion maybe it was kind of a wistful look. Maybe it wasn't. He wouldn't have been so foolish in the head if it had been that sort, for she must have been rather a good pal to him all them years when they was savin' and plannin' together—good-natured, cheerful, full of sand. A clean-cut, wholesome, level-headed woman she seems now, with more pep and fun in her than ever. Jimmy's mornin' appetite didn't appear to be quite so keen as he'd bragged. Now and then he'd throw a skittish look out towards the corridor.

They got through their business talk while Fannie was finishin' her plate of strawberries and cream and Jimmy was downin' his second cocktail.

"I'll tell you, Jimmy," she says, "you'd much better turn over your holdings to me, for there's a minority crowd in there that's planning to put something over on us. I know their game and can block it. I'll pay on yesterday's closing quotations, whatever those were. That right? Then just write out something to that effect and we'll call it settled."

He was busy with his fountain-pen when there came this burst of high squeally giggles and I looked up to see a mixed quartette of four bear-

ing down on us. They were a good deal of the kind you'd expect to see in the Plutoria's Pink Grill—the men of the lounge lizard type, and the girls good runnin' mates for 'em.

The one in the lead is a slim, big-eyed, pert specimen of the squab family. Her complexion is a little too vivid for daylight exhibition, but I expect she'd put the make-up on in kind of a hurry. Her permanent hair wave had stood the test of a short night's sleep, however, and her shaved eyebrows hadn't been rumpled at all. She's dressed fancy and frilly, too. The curved feather on her hat must have stood up two feet in the back. Also her fingers sparkled like a pawnbroker's window. You could guess that she was a warm baby, all right.

"Hello!" says I. "Some cabaret must have let out late."

At which Jimmy glances up. I could see his mouth corners drop and his eyes go stary. But he didn't have time to say a word. Next thing I knew the saucy young thing had tripped right up and was rumplin' his hair.

"Old Pokey!" says she. "Got that last night's grouch with you still? What do I care if you have! Ferdy's going to take me out to Primrose Inn, even if you won't, and—— Oh! Who's all this?"

She hadn't taken much notice of me, but when she spots Fannie it's a different matter. She

was givin' her the once over and repeat. Also, it was up to Jimmy to separate himself from a few remarks.

"There, there, Beryl!" says he peevish. "Didn't I tell you I had a business engagement?"

"Did you, Jimmy, boy?" says she. "And did you think I'd fall for it? Come now. Open up. Who's the lady?"

If Jimmy could think as quick as he can talk loud he might have passed it off graceful. But the thing being batted up to him so sudden that way he kind of got his conversation works gear-bound. And after he'd made some gurgly noises that didn't convey much of anything Fannie comes to his rescue.

"I am Mrs. Fincke," says she, smilin'.

"The devil you are!" says the other, in her pouty, impetuous manner. "I like that, I must say—not."

And as it seemed to be my turn, I puts in: "Mrs. Fincke, Number One."

"Oh!" It comes from Beryl's rouged lips explosive. "Why—why, Jimmy has always let on that you were—— But he always was a good liar. Hey, Jimmy, whaddye mean by that stuff? Eh?" The shake she was giving him was more than playful.

"And you?" asks Fannie. "May I ask——"

"Sure you can," breaks in Beryl. "I'm Mrs. Jimmy Fincke myself."

"Really!" Fannie takes it without a quiver. "Pardon me for being so stupid. I—I might have guessed he would. But he hadn't mentioned it, you see."

"He's a great little forgetter when he tries. Eh, Jimmy boy?" and once more she rumples his hair.

I wish Jimmy hadn't been starin' so dazed all the time. It might have done him good if he could have seen the two of 'em side by side, as I saw 'em. But, then, maybe his view would have been different. I must say that to me Beryl looked mighty cheap and flashy when stacked up against Fannie.

About then the trio in the background, who couldn't have had any hint as to what the chatter was all about, got impatient.

"I say, Beryl," calls one of the young gents with a shadow mustache and slick hair, "how about getting started?"

Beryl don't even turn around. She glances once at Jimmy and then gives Fannie another shrewd stare.

"Nothing doing, Ferdy. Run along," she tells him. "I'm going to stick around."

"Oh, but you mustn't let me interfere with your plans," puts in Fannie. "Jimmy and I

are all through with our business. Did you sign it, Jimmy? Then that's all and I must be going. I've heaps of shopping to do before I start back for the farm. And it's been—er—interesting to meet you—Mrs. Fincke."

"I expect it has?" sneers Beryl.

"And I hope I haven't spoiled any party," adds Fannie. "You must go right ahead."

"Thanks," says Beryl, slippin' into the chair the other was leavin'. "I'll stick around."

I expect she did, too. There was that kind of look in her eyes. But I ain't sure. It seemed to me a swell time to be slidin' out myself. Which I did. This triangle stuff may be all right to watch on a movie screen, but I don't care for it as an accompaniment to lunch.

XVII

"TRAZE BEANS" FOR BUCKY

I was tellin' Sadie about our plans for the war memorial that Rockhurst-on-the-Sound is goin' to put up, one of these days, to show what we think of our gallant soldier boys who answered the call so nobly when it was a case of beatin' back the Hun and—and all that sort of thing.

I kind of hand it to myself, too, that I was spielin' it out some eloquent. Course, I might have been quotin' kind of free from the Rev. Pedders. You see, he's chairman of our committee, and not half an hour before he'd been readin' over to me his draft of the inscription. "In grateful memory of what they did and dared for us," was the way it started off. Swell stuff, take it from me. Sort of makes you warm up under your vest and get dim in the eyes. And I'd told her what the subscription amounted to up to date.

"Perfectly splendid!" says Sadie. "And, by the way, Shorty, I wish you would put in an order for those bedding plants. Here it is after

the first of June and those flower beds haven't been filled yet.''

Isn't that just like a woman? When you're all blown up with patriotic gratitude and—and so on she has to kick in with a reminder of some piffling little thing like that which you've let slip. Shows where their minds run—never higher than the attic windows. But what's the use debatin' such points. They wouldn't understand. So I just hunches my shoulders and starts for the telephone. Might as well do it right off before I forgot.

And I expect it was looking up the name of that big greenhouse firm in Portchester that reminded me of ex-Corporal Buck Kinney. Let's see, wasn't that where Bucky had started in to work when he'd been sent back from France and turned loose from the army? And hadn't he opened up a little hothouse business of his own at his place down on the marshes? Seems to me he had. Maybe he'd have the very stuff we wanted. Might put it in cheaper, too. Anyway, it would be easy to jump in the car and run down there to see. Besides, it had been a month or so since I'd had a talk with Bucky. Most likely I could get him to dig up another one of them war yarns. You know he can spill the real thing, Bucky, for he was through a lot of it; won the D.S. medal, and all that.

Well, I finds him makin' hard-work motions

with a spade, standin' hip deep in a drainage ditch that he's diggin'. He seems glad of an excuse to climb out and scrape some of the mud off his boots and hands.

"No," says he, "I expect I ain't got much you'd want—a few geraniums and salvia. Didn't go in for beddin' plants very heavy this year. I was plannin' mostly on lettuce and cucumbers, but they sort of petered out. That old steam heatin' plant I put in wouldn't work and a lot of the stuff froze on me while I was patchin' it up. I was hoping I could blow myself to a new boiler next fall, but I dunno's I can. It—it's kind of hard scratchin'."

"Still got your job with the greenhouse people, ain't you?" I asks.

He shakes his head discouraged. "They laid me off a month ago," says he. "Got in a new foreman, a Heinie. When he found out I'd been across with the A.E.F. he gave me the quick dump."

"Huh!" says I. "That's what I call a raw deal. Didn't you put up a howl at the office?"

"Tried to," says Bucky, "but they backed up Myers. So I've been doin' the best I could here."

It wasn't much of an outfit to make a living with, for a fact. Bucky explains that he didn't have the capital to build his hothouses right. Besides, this soil down on the marsh was mostly

sour and he needed a lot of chemicals to cure it. If he could do that it would be just right for bulbs—narcissus, dahlias, crocus, gladioli, and so on; and if he was able to lay in a stock for next spring he thought he could make a good thing of it.

"Have you tried 'em down at the bank?" says I.

"Nothing doing," says he. "Old Dishler wouldn't lend me a dollar."

"Wouldn't, eh?" says I, scratchin' my head. I'd just remembered how it was the Hon. Hi Dishler who'd made that spread eagle speech when we welcomed the boys home, and had dragged Bucky up on the platform and patted him on the back while he told the folks what a hero he was.

Course, he looked different then. He was right off the transport, wearin' his new uniform with the gold service stripes, his medal, and his divisional insignia. Lately he'd been goin' around in old overalls and rubber boots. And as he leads the way up to the porch of the little shack where he lives with the old folks, and slumps down in a rickety chair, you'd hardly suspect he ever went out under shell and machine gun fire to drag back one of his wounded men.

"It's kind of too bad," he goes on. "I know I've got the right dope on the business. You

see, there's goin' to be a big demand for bulbs next season, on account of the war havin' put a crimp in the importin' game for so long. Come from Holland and Belgium mostly, and they're just beginning again. I got a circular from an importin' house only the other day and wrote in to get their prices. Funny thing, too. They had Sunderbeeke stuff. Sunderbeeke. That's about forty kilometers southeast of Dunkirk."

"Been there, have you?" I suggests.

"I should say I had," says Bucky. "That's where we got our first dose of front line work. They brigaded us with the Frenchies, in reserve at the start, but then we were moved up to take over what was supposed to be a quiet sector. Maybe it was once, but after some of our boys got to cuttin' loose at everything they saw the Boches got busy—snipers, machine guns, trench mortars. We sure stirred 'em up.

"Rummy hole, this Sunderbeeke spot. Couldn't have been much of a town to begin with, but after a couple of years of bombardment it was a mess. Not a whole buildin' left, and the town hall and such places were just piles of brick. Great shell holes in the street. And every night reg'lar at 7.30 the Huns gave it forty minutes of strafing, just to show they could still register on it, I expect. At that there was folks livin' there still. Just stickin'

around. What they could find to do, or what they lived on is by me. I remember one old guy special. Say, he was a bird, he was."

Bucky stops to indulge in a chuckle. Then he goes on. "Crawled out of a cellar one day when I was out with a salvage detail. A tall, thin, whiskered old relic. His toes was stickin' out of his shoes, his shirt looked like it was made out of a window shade, and his hands were like claws. Yet he's wearin' a battered silk lid, if you please, and a long black coat. Carried a gold-headed cane, too. Almost as if he'd been got up for a masquerade. 'Howdy, Grandpop,' says I. 'Where's the party at?' And blamed if he don't come back at me in straight English. He ain't sore or anything at my guyin' him. Says how glad he is to see us Americans on the job at last and that now he knows the Huns will be driven back where they belong.

"Yea-uh! had quite a chat with the old boy. Queer old scout. Just as dignified in them duds as if he'd had on full evenin' dress. Told me how he'd been right there, ever since the Huns began throwin' shells into the place. Said he had a couple of sons in the muss, but he hadn't heard from either of 'em in over a year. He'd lost the old lady, too. Piece of shrapnel through the window. He'd been gassed once himself,

but had got over it. And when I asks how he scrapes up enough to live on he just hunches his shoulders. 'One doesn't live,' says he, 'one endures.' Didn't look like he'd had a square meal for months.

"Well, I kept seein' him around every day or so. Once I carted out half a loaf of white bread to him. Say, you should have seen them old eyes of his shine. His claw fingers trembled so he could hardly grab it. He stops only long enough to take off his old silk lid, and beg my pardon polite, and then he squats right down in the doorway of the nearest deserted house and goes to it. Hungry! Say, I hope I never work up an appetite like that.

"Afterwards I used to sneak out other stuff to him—a little bag of sugar, a knuckle of ham, a tobacco tin full of butter. I almost got kissed for the butter. 'You Americans are wonderful people,' says he. I didn't deny it. 'I am told,' he goes on, 'that among your private soldiers are many wealthy men, even millionaires.' 'Sure,' says I. 'I'm one myself!' I wanted to see what kind of a rise that I would get out of him. Off comes the plug hat and he bends nearly double. 'I am honored, M'sieu,' says he. 'Don't mention it,' says I.

"Then he wants to know if my people made their fortune in gold mines or railroads! 'Nothing like that,' says I. 'Flour.' 'Ah!'

says he, not quite gettin' me. 'In flowers. Then you are what they call in America a florist king, yes?' Your hothouses are great, extensive?' 'You bet,' says I. 'End to end they'd about reach from here to Berlin, with enough glass in 'em to roof in your whole country.' Say, I sure fed it to him strong and he don't gag over swallowin' a single detail. I tells him how we have a trolley track runnin' through the middle for the hands to go back and forth on and that we sometimes cut as high as a million roses a day, at a dollar a rose. He holds up both hands at that. 'Marvelleuse!' says he. 'And you reside in a great château somewhere?' 'Yep!' says I. 'Overlooking the works and Long Island Sound. Come over and see us some time.' And, say, the old bird actually writes down my name and address."

"What if he should show up some day?" I suggests.

"Him!" says Buck Kinney. "Fat chance! Most likely he's starved to death long before this. Even if he hasn't I don't expect he could raise the price of a jitney ride to the next town. Seemed to know a little about the florist business himself. Maybe he'd had a little bulb patch somewhere around. He sure was an easy mark when it came to kiddin', though. Saw the Loot passin' one day and wants to know who he is. 'Why, that's young Mike Rockefeller,'

says I. 'You know, the one who owns all the gasoline in the world.' And off comes the old silk lid again. Yea-uh! He helped pass the time away in Sunderbeeke."

I couldn't help joinin' Bucky in a chuckle, and after promisin' to see if I couldn't get some of our new made war-plutes interested enough to help finance his little enterprise, I starts back. Just as I was swingin' into the Post Road I gets the hail from someone in a taxi. Don't often see one of them blue and green cabs so far from Broadway, so I pulls up. Leanin' through the window is a spruce, dignified old party with a neat trimmed full beard. He's wearin' a shiny new tall hat, frock coat, and eyeglasses on a wide black ribbon. Sort of foreign and distinguished lookin'.

"Pardon," says he, "but could you direct me to the château of M. Kinney?"

"Eh?" says I, gawpin'. "You don't mean Buck Kinney?"

"It may be," says he. "M. Kinney, who was a soldier."

"That's him," says I. "Did you say château or shanty?"

"Shanty?" says he, startin' puzzled. "Ah, I comprehend. That is American for château, perhaps?"

"Not exactly," says I. "You see, we don't have many châteaus over here, but shanties——

Well, that's a better description of what Bucky lives in."

"May I ask," goes on the old boy, "is it situated near to his hothouses?"

"Right next door," says I.

"Tiens!" says he. "He will be the one. Permit me to mention that I am M. Sterpin, of Sunderbeeke, Belgium, and if you will be so kind as to indicate to my driver——"

"I'll do better than that," says I, grinnin' wide. "I've just come from talkin' with Bucky myself and as it's kind of a blind road I'll pilot you down there."

Course, I wasn't goin' to miss anything like that. First off it struck me as kind of weird that he should show up just then, so soon after Bucky'd been givin' me the tale. But then I remembers about the circular, and how Bucky had written, and it don't seem so strange.

He was still sittin' slumped in the chair on the little porch almost hangin' over the creek, and when he sees who piles out of the taxi it got his eyes buggin' like a pair of brass doorknobs.

"Hey, Bucky," I sings out. "I guess here's an old friends of yours."

"But—but is there not some mistake?" says M. Sterpin, starin' around at the old shack, the muddy little tidewater creek, and the marshes.

"We'll see," says I. "Anyhow, this is ex-Corporal Buck Kinney. How about it, Bucky, don't you recognize Mr. Sterpin?"

"Why," says Bucky, rubbin' his chin, "I can't say I do. Voice does sound kind of familiar though, but——"

"And yours!" breaks in the old boy. "It is the American soldier. You will recall me—M. Sterpin, of Sunderbeeke."

And you should have seen Bucky's mouth come open. "What-a-at?" says he. "The one I told all that to about how I was——"

"Mais oui!" says Sterpin, shruggin' his shoulders and spreadin' out his hands. "So these are the great hothouses, this the château, eh?"

At first Bucky flushes up and looks foolish. Then he gets a grip on himself and grins. "I expect I was throwin' the bull a bit."

"Meaning," suggests Sterpin, "that you exaggerated? So it would appear."

"You seemed to like it, you know," goes on Bucky. "But you fooled me some, yourself. Why, you were got up like a panhandler. What was the idea?"

"True," says the old boy. "But it was from necessity. What would you do? When the enemy may come at any moment one does not wish to appear other than as a poor beggar. And I was so in fact. Yes, there was the gold

I had buried deep. But when one cannot buy food with gold of what use is it? So there I chose to stay, in the ruins of my home, in sight of my war-torn fields."

Then he goes on to tell how, when it was all over, he had dug up his cash, patched his house, and started in to rebuild his smashed business. He'd had a ton or so of fancy bulbs stored away in vaults so his first move had been to come over here, shake up things in his New York branch, and try to unload. His idea was to call on all the old customers and rustle up as many new ones as possible. That's how he happened to run across this letter of Buck Kinney's. Course, that reminds him of the American soldier whose hothouses would stretch nearly to Berlin and with visions of placin' a big order he comes right out.

"It seems that I have, as we say, swallowed the fish," he remarks, gazin' 'round.

He don't act grouchy over it. I thought I saw almost a twinkle in them shrewd old eyes of his. As for Bucky, while he's still some red in the ears, he's bluffin' it through well.

"You people over there were easy, all right," says he. "Just because we scattered francs careless you suspected we was all recruited right on Fifth Avenue. It was the first time I ever had a chance to pass for a plute, and I expect I played it for all it was worth. If I'd

had a hunch you'd ever follow it up maybe I'd have drawn it milder. Too bad though, you blew in all that taxi fare just on my account."

"One always pays to learn," says Sterpin. "Besides, I have not forgotten the white bread, the sugar, the butter."

"Aw, them things!" says Bucky. "I swiped 'em off the mess table."

"I understand," says the other. "Yet except for those timely gifts—— Well, who knows? And as I have come I may as well view your establishment, even if it is not large enough to roof all Belgium. Hein?"

"Well, traze beans, as you say," says Bucky, springin' some of his doughboy French. "There's the whole of it," and he waves his hand at the 10 x 20 shack with a half dozen second-hand window sash let into the top.

The old boy insists on walkin' out and inspectin' it solemn. He even pokes his fingers into the soil of the beds and smells of it. Then he shakes his head.

"All very crude," says he. "It requires lime and phosphates. There should be ventilation as well as heat. This does not appear sufficient, either," and he jerks his thumb at the rusty boiler.

"I'm wise to that," says Bucky. "It's all I could buy with the money I had, though."

"But I had heard," goes on Sterpin, "that

your government had voted many millions to aid her returned heroes."

"Maybe," says Bucky. "All that was handed to me was my $60 bonus and my discharge papers when they turned me loose."

"There are your townspeople, however," puts in the old boy, "those for whom you went across the sea to face the cannon. Surely, they have not forgotten so quickly?"

"I dunno," says Bucky. "Shorty McCabe here has helped me some, but outside of him there ain't nobody been around much. Anyway, they ain't come and forced any millions on me. Not that I was lookin' for anything like that. All I want is a chance, a start."

"True," says Sterpin. "And might I ask what are these plans of yours?"

At which Bucky sketches out how, if he had the stock, he could supply the local market with potted plants and cut flowers; also where he wanted to add on to his houses, and about the new heater.

"Ah, yes!" says the old gent from Sunderbeeke, twirlin' his glasses thoughtful. "Well, it shall be done. Yes, at once."

"Eh?" says Bucky, gawpin' at him.

"You shall build on our credit," says M. Sterpin. "I will arrange that at the office.

From our store of bulbs you may have what you wish, too. And you shall repay as you are able."

"What!" says Bucky. "You—you mean you'll take a chance on backin' me? Me!"

"Why not?" says the other. "One must find new customers, and the field hereabouts should be a good one. Perhaps we shall not lose on the venture, after all. If we do—Pouff! It goes that way, business. To-morrow you will receive a statement of deposit to your credit. Then you may make your start."

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" gasps Bucky. "Say, that's what I call mighty decent of you, Mr. Sterpin."

"Too amiable!" protests the old boy. "We Belgians are not much different from your own people. We have an eye on the main chance, for the most part, but now and then some of us remember who it was that helped rid us of the Boche. Yes. Then there was that white bread. Well, what do you expect when one has eaten only bran and potatoes for two years? Z-z-zut! It is but fair that I should make some small return. My best wishes for your success, M. Kinney."

And he leaves Bucky, his mouth still open, diggin' into the black dirt with the toe of his rubber boot.

"You know, Bucky," I suggests, "we're plannin' to put your name in bronze letters up on the monument."

"Huh!" says Bucky, not gettin' excited at all.

"I get you," says I. "You're thinkin' how much nicer it'll be to be able to write it on a check. Eh?"

And Bucky he straightens up, throws out his chest, and grins.

XVIII

LITTLE SULLY COMES THROUGH

I EXPECT I was feelin' a bit more chipper than usual. Maybe I was a trifle chesty. Anyway, things had been runnin' smooth at the Physical Culture Studio with a lot of my old reg'lars back, a sportin' friend of mine had paid up fifty that I'd staked him to over a year ago, and coming out on the 5.06 two of my neighbors had insisted I must stand for another term on the School Board. Besides, there was Sadie waitin' at the station for me with the little roadster.

"Well, how's the girl?" says I, swingin' off the smoker.

You get that girl stuff, don't you? It's a good line to pull, believe me, even if most of the things you got at your tin weddin' have been sent to the discard and there are youngsters around the house who are always callin' her "Maw." And as a rule it gets Sadie workin' up that crooked smile of hers.

But not this time. I could tell at a glance that Sadie has something heavy sittin' on her

mind. It ain't like her to keep it back, either. She unloads it at once.

"Shorty," says she, "Mr. Dishler wants you to call at the office as you go by."

"The Hon. Hi, eh?" says I. "Oh, very well."

"He—he seemed rather serious about it," suggests Sadie.

"Of course," says I. "He would. He's that kind."

"I hope you haven't offended him again, Shorty," says she.

"That's a whale of a hope," says I, "when my mission in life seems to be to do things that give the Hon. Hi Dishler shudders down the spine."

It's a sad fact. I ain't boastin' about it. Maybe I ought to be hangin' my head as I admit it. But somehow if I should find I was pleasin' the Hon. Hi consistent I'd begin to suspect I wasn't runnin' true to form. Fat chance, though. I suppose we're about as different as we could be and still belong to the same human race. I know Dishler would take his oath to that and I'm afraid I wouldn't deny it, either. And yet here we have to live in the same town when we might have half the map between us. I expect, though, that wherever I went I'd find a Hi Dishler, or somebody like him; and perhaps he couldn't settle anywhere without run-

nin' into a Shorty McCabe. Besides, life wouldn't be half so interesting if it wasn't like that.

"Cheer up, Sadie," says I. "Maybe it's only a note I've endorsed for somebody and forgot about; or he might want to make another offer for our shore frontage."

That's the careless, happy-go-lucky mood I was in when I rolls up in front of the Rockhurst Development Company's offices, next door to the bank. I even chuckles a little when he lets on not to see the friendly wave I gives him, but marches out to the curb stiff and dignified and lifts his black derby an inch or so off his curly gray hair.

By rights he never should have quit wearin' a silk lid. Course, I know it ain't being done now on week days, except by auctioneers and funeral directors, but nothing else in the line of headgear quite goes with them white side whiskers of his. They went out of date before the shiny tiles did, but the Hon. Hi couldn't bear to part with his. I hope he never does, for as he stands —frock coat, gray spats, and his eyeglasses anchored to him with a wide ribbon—he needs no tag or label. He is our Prominent Citizen. Any new commuter would know that at a glance. Also that here was one of the Upper Classes.

"Want to see me, did you?" I asks.

"Yes," says he. "And I wish you to see something, too. Will you turn off the Post Road just this side of the Nut and Bolt Works? I will follow in my own car."

"Huh!" says I to Sadie as we starts on. "What the deuce?"

But Sadie don't have the answer. I can tell by the way she looks, though, that she's sure I've made another bad break somehow, either socially, politically or otherwise.

When we get to this side street that runs down as far as the railroad I stops just at the beginning of the line of new billboards that the Civic Society has done so much grumblin' over. Here about two acres have been fenced in, with three sides covered with advertising signs. I was just noticin' where a 20-foot gap had been burned, wipin' out a perfectly good corset ad. and eatin' into a "Drink Whisko" announcement, when the Hon. Hi catches up with us.

"Well, McCabe," says he, "what do you think of that?"

"Oh," says I, "it does kind of mess up the landscape, but——"

"I am not referring to the signboards," breaks in Dishler, "but to the damage which has been done to them."

"Oh, I get you," says I. "The burned area? How did it catch?"

"It did not catch," says he. "It was a case

of incendiarism. The fence was set on fire, maliciously."

"Well, well!" says I. "I remember hearin' the alarm. One evenin' early in the week, wasn't it? Not such a fierce catastrophe, though. I should say about $25 would cover——"

"That is hardly the point," says he. "The question is, McCabe; can property be burned up at will in this community?"

"Say, what's the grand idea?" I comes back at him. "Don't think I'm any arson expert, do you? Why ask me?"

"Because it may develop that you are more interested in this affair than you suspect," says he.

"Eh?" says I, gawpin'.

"This fire," he goes on, "was deliberately set by a gang of boys, and I am sorry to say, McCabe, that we have good cause to believe that your son was among them, if not the actual leader."

"Sully!" gasps Sadie, clutchin' my arm panicky.

"There, there!" says I. "Let's hear the rest of this. What makes you think my boy was in it, Dishler?"

"This, for one item," says he, producin' a document envelope and fishin' out of it a small sized handkerchief.

Sure enough, there in the corner is one of the markers Sadie sews on all of Sully's things.

"That was found, with an empty gasoline can, in the ditch here," says the Hon. Hi. "Smell it, please."

I didn't need to hold it very near to get the scent of gas on it, either. Things was lookin' squally for the house of McCabe just then.

"I don't believe a word of it," says Sadie.

"Mothers seldom do believe such things," says Dishler, with one of them undertaker smiles of his. "Unfortunately, though, facts are facts. But this is not all. The attempt to destroy several hundred dollars worth of property having been discovered promptly and the damage limited, these youthful outlaws returned some time during last night and committed a second offense. If you will step down the street a short distance, McCabe, I will show you."

Well, I stepped. So did Sadie. The Hon. Hi, he stepped on ahead. And at about the fourth billboard he stops and waves his hand dramatic, "There!" says he. "The second outrage."

I'll admit it wasn't real polite of me to snicker just then, 'specially when you consider who was submittin' the exhibit. But it slips out before I could smother it. And I expect it'll be a long day before I can think of what he was pointin' out so indignant without a chuckle.

For one thing, it was done so ingenious. This particular billboard was devoted to advertisin' Monkey Brand laundry soap. And there was the monk painted vivid and life size, with the upper half of him sawed out and stickin' up above the top of the board. You've seen the same thing, and read the motto: "Always look for him on both sides of the bar—Mason's Monkey."

Well, what had somebody done but taken one of the Hon. Hi's old campaign posters, that was scattered 'round so liberal when he ran for the Assembly a couple years back, cut out the head and pasted it neat over the monkey's face. So there he is, white sideboards and all, beamin' down on us with that condescendin' "Now-my-good-people" look of his, with the monk's hairy arm and claw fingers holdin' out a cake of laundry soap. It's a scream, that's all. The wonder is I didn't let out a haw-haw instead of a mere snicker.

"You find it humorous, do you?" demands Dishler, gettin' pink clear up into his sideboards.

"Don't expect me to weep over it, I hope?" says I. "Course, it's kind of raw, 'specially that 'Look for him on both sides of the bar' advice, with you such a strong prohibitionist. Eh?"

But the Hon. Hi never could see a joke. "Do

I understand, McCabe," says he, stiffenin', "that you approve of such a scurrilous attack on a man of my standing? That all you can see in this outrage is a cheap jest?"

"Oh, I wouldn't go so far as that," says I. "It's a bit rough on you, I expect, being made a monkey of so public, but it ain't any killin' matter at that. Just shows you've got yourself disliked by somebody or other who took a lot of pains to be funny at your expense. All you got to do is have somebody climb up and tear it down."

"Precisely, McCabe," says he. "That is why I brought you out here."

"Me?" says I.

He nods. "The young ruffians who set the fire," he goes on, "were the same ones who returned and did this. As your son was among them I am holding you responsible for his acts. I will give you three minutes to remove that."

"Well, that ought to be time enough," says I, "providin' I felt like climbin'. But somehow I don't. Not just yet, anyway. I ain't so sure you've got a clear case against Sully. Course, if you have—— Well, that's different. But I've got to look into this case myself first."

The Hon. Hi agrees to that. "And when you do find that he helped perpetrate this outrage," he goes on, "I shall expect you to give him the sound thrashing that he deserves."

"I don't know about that," says I. "I ain't much of a hand at whaling youngsters. Never had to, so far. Still, settin' fires is kind of serious, and if it was done out of pure cussedness——"

"Ah!" says the Hon. Hi. "Now you are taking the proper viewpoint. I think two or three hours will be long enough for you to investigate. And I trust you to act promptly. I shall call at your house about 9 o'clock this evening to have you assure me that the punishment has been thoroughly administered. The matter of settling the material damage can be taken up later."

With that ultimatum he stalks off, jumps into his car, and leaves Sadie and me starin' at each other blank.

"The idea!" says she. "Why should Sully do things like that? And how could he, anyway? It's absurd. He might have lost that handkerchief anywhere, you know."

"Still," says I, "it looks like it was up to me to do a little sleuth work on this. There's no denyin' that the youngsters Sully runs with are a lively bunch and that wherever they go he's generally in the lead. Just why they should land on Dishler so hard, though, is what gets me. Maybe it was some other gang, after all."

When I got home the first thing I did was to look for a five-gallon gasoline can that I remem-

bered was about half full in the corner of the garage. It was gone. Then I spots a lightweight 15-foot ladder that I keeps hangin' along one side of the garage. There's red clay on the bottom ends of the ladder, the kind that I'd noticed thrown up where they'd sunk the uprights for the billboards.

"Huh!" says I to myself.

There wasn't much doubt but that the Hon. Hi had the goods on Sully, and as I makes a line for the house I admit I was some hectic under the collar. What sort of young terrier was we bringin' up, anyway? Here for two nights he'd been A.W.O.L. and when we thought he was sleepin' peaceful in his little nursery cot he was out traipsin' around with a gang of young village cut-ups, settin' fires, defacin' billboards, and gettin' mixed up with the Lord knows what other kinds of crime. It begun to look as though I was more or less of a flivver in the stern parent rôle.

As a matter of fact, I'd been kind of proud of my record, for in all of little Sully's ten years I couldn't remember but twice when I'd had to lay him across my knee. Not that I mean to give out how he was any angel child. He's a reg'lar boy, Sully, and just as full of it as the next one, if not fuller. But up to now he hadn't pulled anything, barrin' them two breaks, that seemed to call for the hot hand exercise.

Course, there'd been little things, such as his mother could handle by a bread-and-milk supper sentence or an hour's solitary confinement. And the few times when the charges were more serious and he'd been turned over to me I'd generally found, after gettin' his side of it, that the case wasn't so bad as it seemed. That was my system, a square deal and a chance to put in a full defense. We'd just sit down quiet and talk it over, Sully and me, and he'd never failed to come across with the whole story, straight and clean. But now—I was wonderin' where I could cut a birch switch.

"What do you think?" asks Sadie anxious, as I comes in.

"I guess it's a verdict of guilty on both counts," says I. "I found more evidence. Where is he?"

"Having supper in there," says she, pointin' towards the dining room alcove.

That's another part of my system. Sully knows that eating supper with his little sister at 6 ain't a case of must. He can if he wants to, or he can stay up and have dinner with us an hour later. But generally he's too tired and hungry to wait. Anyway, he suits himself, and there's no howlin' around.

I walks in and pulls a chair up to the little table. Maybe I gives him the cold eye as I does

it. But that don't feaze him in the least. He's about as much afraid of me as he is of old Towzer.

"Hullo, Pop!" says he, through a mouthful of bread and jam.

Some husk for a ten-year-old, Sully is, you know. He's got a chest on him like a nail keg already, and he's well muscled. Baseball and swimmin' and football accounts for that. Also he shows a good healthy color through the tan and freckles. Even the reddish curly hair is faded on top from being in the sun so much. And them wide blue eyes of his—just like Sadie's—are clear and steady. Who would think, to look at him, that he'd slip out at night and start a fire just out of deviltry?

"Sully," says I. "I've been having a talk with Mr. Dishler."

"Old Dishy, eh?" says he. "Yar-r-r! He's an old stiff, he is."

"Think so?" says I. "Why?"

"Cause he is," says Sully. "Ask any of the boys. Reg'lar crab."

"But you haven't anything 'special against him, have you?" I asks.

"Ain't we, though!" says Sully. "Huh!"

"Well, let it come," says I. "Just what in particular?"

Sully squirms a bit in his chair, as if he was uneasy about sayin' any more, but after a

second or so he straightens up. "What did he want to go chase us off'n our ball field for?" he demands.

"When was that?" says I. "Where?"

"Week ago Sat'day," says Sully. "Right in the middle of the fifth, when we had the Leather Necks 'leven-nine and th' bases full. Comes drivin' up with a couple of special cops and gives us th' chase. Tries to throw a scare into us about puttin' us all in th' coop if we ever come back. You know where we play, down by th' Nut'n' Bolt?"

"Yes, I remember," says I. "You boys have been using that field for quite a spell, haven't you?"

"Always been a di'mond there," says Sully. "Long as I been goin' to school. And year before last didn't our team spend a lot to have the outfield graded off, and put in a rubber plate? That's why we couldn't buy uniforms that season. And now, just because his bum land comp'ny has fenced it all in with billboards he comes and gives us the run, busts up our game, and calls us hoodlums. The old grouch!"

"H-m-m-m!" says I. "Couldn't you find some other field, though?"

"Where, Pop?" demands Sully.

I couldn't say. Rockhurst ain't built up so thick. There seems to be plenty of land around, but when you come to look it over I expect

you'll find somebody's claimin' to use most of it. Places like the Boomer-Day estate, where they got over thirty acres fenced in with a stone wall.

"Course," I goes on, "that may seem a bit rough on you youngsters, but I expect Mr. Dishler didn't know. Maybe if you'd explained the case——"

"Yar-r-r!" says Sully. "Didn't me and Slippy Dugan go down to the bank that next Monday afternoon and try to show him? He wouldn't let us get in a word. Calls in that big roughneck janitor and has us yanked out by the collar. 'Throw these young rascals out, Mide,' says he. And Slippy's old man saw him bein' fired and gives him a lickin' for it. That's what we got from old Dishy."

"And then?" says I.

With that Sully pinks up in the ears and begins to fidget. I waits, watchin' him without a word, until he looks up again. And once more he's meetin' me square in the eyes.

"Would you have stood for anything like that, Pop," says he, "without tryin' to get even? The boys put it up to me and I—— Well, I'll tell you the whole thing. You see, I——"

"Wait, Sully," I breaks in. "It'll keep, won't it? Then maybe I'd better not know too much about what you did. Not just now, any-

way. Understand, I ain't sayin' whether you should have done whatever you did or not. But startin' a fire is kind of serious work. Might mean jail. So I'm hoping you didn't."

"But I didn't, Pop. Honest!" says Sully. "I tried to tell 'em. Course, though, when they——"

"Yes, I think I understand," says I. "As for the other—pastin' Dishler's face on the monkey—that sounds more like your work, although I don't figure just how you could do it so well."

"Slippy's old man does wall paperin'," suggests Sully.

"So he does," says I. "And he might have done that job while he was sleep-walkin', eh? Or he might have left some paste around handy. But I guess you boys had better call it quits on Dishler. And no more night prowlin' from you, young man. Understand?"

"All right, Pop," says Sully. "I'll lay off it."

And I leaves him to finish his supper.

"Well?" says Sadie, who's been out in the livin' room all this time with her fingers gripped, listenin'.

"Extenuatin' circumstances," says I.

"But—but he didn't do all these dreadful things Mr. Dishler accuses him of, did he?" she asks.

"Not half," says I.

"There!" says Sadie. "I just knew he didn't."

And after dinner she calls down from upstairs for me to come take a look. "He's asleep already," says she. "See?"

And say, with his curly head snuggled down on the pillow and his long lashes quiet on his cheeks, and a peaceful smile playin' around the corners of his lips, he does look more or less like a young cherub. As we stands watchin' him I hears the door buzzer. Tellin' Sadie to stay there I tiptoes out easy. It's the Hon. Hi, on hand to the minute.

"Well, McCabe," says he, "have you given him that thrashing?"

"Not yet," says I.

"What?" says he. "Then when do you intend——"

"Not until I catch him doin' something worse than I'd do if I was in his place," says I.

"Very well," says he, shruggin' his shoulders. "You know the alternative. It will be a somewhat disagreeable duty for me, but I shall make a charge of malicious mischief."

"Think you can prove it?" says I.

"I shall try," says he. "You may expect an officer up in the morning."

"Dishler," says I, "have you thought out just what kind of a figure you're goin' to cut

prosecutin' a ten-year-old boy in police court? And another thing: You know them billboards your company put up ain't any too popular. You and the billboards are goin' to be thrown up prominent in this case, if it comes off. A lot of people who haven't seen you posin' as Mason's monkey are goin' to hear all the details. Some of 'em will snicker. Then about the boys' ball field. Wasn't that kind of hoggish of you to run 'em off? What harm was they doin', anyway? It strikes me, Dishler, that if I'd been the one to block puttin' through that school playground scheme, as you did last spring, I'd have thought twice about chasin' the youngsters off a vacant lot."

Maybe you can guess that by this time the Hon. Hi has worked up quite a neck color. The white side whiskers looked 'most like they was sproutin' out of red flannel.

"I shall run my own affairs in my own way," says he, kind of hoarse and throaty. "If you want to save the young rascal from arrest you must punish him yourself."

"I suppose you'd like to see the thrashin' done? Right now, eh?" says I.

"That would be most satisfactory," says he.

"Oh, well," says I, sighin'. "He's upstairs. Come along."

And before the Hon. Hi could back out I've towed him in beside the cot where little Sully

is smilin' at the funny things in his dreams. I don't know how long it's been since Hi Dishler has had a close-up of a sleepin' youngster. I believe he has a grown-up son somewhere out West, and I think I heard 'em say he lost another years back. But both of 'em must have been about Sully's age once. Also, while the Hon. Hi is kind of stiff-necked as a bank president, and more or less of a shark when it comes to real estate deals, he's been a daddy, too. And as I was admittin' just now, Sully asleep is easier to look at than any stained glass cherub you ever saw.

"What do you say?" says I. "Shall I wake him up and thrash him now?"

"Eh?" says Dishler, startin' as though I'd punched him in the ribs. "No, no, McCabe. I —I've been rather hasty, I fear. Rather an ass, too." And he starts backin' out.

"You see," says I, as we gets down to the front hall, "the boys was kind of sore. It was the only place they had to play ball in. Now if you could sort of give out that they might——"

"Yes, yes, of course they may," he breaks in. "Until we give them a regular playground, at least. I—I think you're right about that, Shorty."

"Say," says I. "You're goin' to see a tickled lot of kids out there if you should drop around some afternoon. Which reminds me of

something else. That soap ad. I'm ready to climb now. Got your car here? Good! Wait a minute until I get a ladder and I'll go along with you."

When I lugs out the little ladder he takes a squint at it in the moonlight.

"Think that's long enough?" says he.

"Sure," says I, "unless it's shrunk since the other night."

"Oh!" says he, and if it hadn't been the Hon. Hi Dishler I should have said he followed it with a chuckle.

THE END

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